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Monday, 29 June 1998, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Monteiro	(Portugal)
Members:	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Brazil	Mr. Amorim
	China	Mr. Qin Huasun
	Costa Rica	Mr. Sáenz Biolley
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Gabon	Mr. Essonghé
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Japan	Mr. Owada
	Kenya	Mr. Mahugu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zmeevski
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	Sweden	Mr. Dahlgren
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir John Weston
	United States of America	Mr. Richardson

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

98-85516 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Argentina, Burundi, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Norway and Slovakia, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Petrella (Argentina), Mr. Ndaruzaniye (Burundi), Mr. Fowler (Canada), Mr. Šmejkal (Czech Republic), Mr. Eitel (Germany), Mr. Donokusumo (Indonesia), Mr. Fulci (Italy), Mr. Snoussi (Morocco), Mr. Dos Santos (Mozambique), Mr. Andjaba (Namibia), Mr. Kolby (Norway) and Mr. Keltošová (Slovakia) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The first speaker on my list is the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Otunnu: It is a great honour for me to appear before the Security Council, and it is a great honour for me to appear under your presidency, Sir. I congratulate you on the leadership which you have provided, especially on the plight of children affected by armed conflict.

We are on the eve of a new millennium. There will be much to celebrate because in the modern era our civilization has achieved breathtaking advances in virtually every field of human endeavour. And yet these quantum leaps in human progress coexist uneasily with a darker side of our civilization. Witness our capacity to inflict and tolerate grave injustice, our capacity for deep hatred and cruelty towards our fellow human beings. See how we can destroy entire communities in the quest for power or in the name of ethnicity, religion, race or class.

A crucial measure of our civilization must be its human quality. It has to do with how we treat our fellow human beings and, above all, it has to do with how we treat the most innocent and most vulnerable members of our community, those who represent the future of every society — our children.

On the eve of the new millennium, we are witnessing an abomination, an abomination directed against children in the context of armed conflict. At this moment, in approximately 50 countries around the world children are suffering from the impact of armed conflict, in its midst and in its aftermath.

In the last decade alone, we have seen 2 million children killed, over 1 million orphaned, 6 million seriously injured or permanently disabled, 12 million made homeless and 10 million left with serious psychological trauma. Children, especially girls, have been made the targets of rape and other forms of sexual violence on a large scale.

At present, half of the total population of refugees and internally displaced persons in the world are children. An estimated 800 children are killed or maimed by landmines every month. It is estimated that a quarter of a million young persons under the age of 18 are currently under arms, serving as child soldiers in various theatres of conflict around the world.

War is nothing new to the human experience. Neither is the incidence of civilian casualties in times of war. But the magnitude of what we are witnessing attests to a new phenomenon: a qualitative shift in the nature

and the conduct of warfare. It is not war as we have known it in the modern era.

This transformation is underscored by several developments. Almost all the major armed conflicts in the world today are internal. They are being fought by multiple semi-autonomous armed groups within national boundaries. They are marked by a particular brand of lawlessness, cruelty and chaos. In particular, they are characterized by the systematic and widespread targeting of civilian populations. In these situations, the belligerents routinely ignore international humanitarian laws, which have traditionally moderated, if not governed, the conduct of inter-State warfare.

The conflicts tend to be protracted, lasting years, if not decades, often in recurring cycles, thus exposing successive generations of children to horrendous violence. And most cynically, children have been compelled to become instruments of war, recruited or kidnapped to become child soldiers. Moreover, the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines and the proliferation of light weapons have underscored the particular vulnerability of children in these situations.

Civil wars are fought among those who know each other well, among enemy brothers and enemy sisters. They pit compatriot against compatriot, neighbour against neighbour. A key feature of these struggles is a demonization of the so-called enemy community, often defined in religious, ethnic, racial or regional terms. In the intense and intimate setting of today's internecine warfare, the village has become the battlefield and civilian populations its primary target. It is against this background that today up to 90 per cent of casualties in ongoing conflicts around the world are civilians, the vast majority of whom are women and children. This is the world upside down.

This abomination is due in large measure to a crisis of values, both at the international and the local level. The traditional limits on the conduct of warfare — international instruments as well as local injunctions and taboos — are being cast aside. This has given rise to an ethical vacuum, a setting in which international standards are ignored with impunity and where local value systems have lost their sway.

To reverse this trend of abomination, we must take concerted measures at both the national and the international level. In this connection, I wish to propose a number of measures and areas of engagement, in the light of which we can move towards prevention, protection and recovery.

The first area of engagement concerns the wide gap which currently exists between the existence of international norms and their non-observance on the ground. Over the past 50 years, the nations of the world have developed an impressive repertoire of international humanitarian and human rights instruments. Several of these address the rights, protection and welfare of children. The most pertinent in this regard are the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions, along with their additional Protocols. Together, these instruments contain a number of provisions designed to ensure the protection and welfare of children in situations of international as well as internal armed conflict.

But the value of these provisions is limited to the extent to which they are applied. Today, the gap between these norms and the situation on the ground remains unacceptably wide, and it is growing. Words on paper cannot save children in peril. To bridge this gap, the international community must be prepared to demonstrate its commitment, determination and readiness to use its collective influence and weight to ensure the observance of these norms and, therefore, the protection of children. The Security Council can lead the way by sending forth a clear message that the targeting, use and abuse of children are simply unacceptable. A message needs to go out that it cannot be "business as usual" when atrocities and abuses are systematically committed against children.

Secondly, at a very fundamental level, I believe that perhaps the most damaging and disorienting loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own local value system. In most societies, even in times of war, fundamental values and rules mattered. Distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable practices were maintained, with taboos and injunctions proscribing indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations, especially women and children.

For example, I grew up in a society where the concept of *lapir* was very strong. Among the Acholi people, *lapir* denotes the cleanliness of one's claim, which then attracts the blessing of the ancestors in recognition and support of that claim. Before declaring war, the elders would carefully examine their *lapir* to be sure that their community had a deep and well-founded grievance against the other side. If this was established to be the case, war might be declared, but never lightly. But

in order to preserve the original *lapir*, strict injunctions would be issued to regulate the actual conduct of war. One did not attack children, women or the elderly; one did not destroy crops, granary stores or livestock, for to violate such taboos would be to soil one's *lapir*, with the consequence that one would forfeit the blessings of the ancestors and thereby risk losing the war itself. Moreover, in declaring war there was always the presumption of coexistence in the post-conflict period. Therefore, in prosecuting a war effort one took great care to avoid violating taboos and committing acts of humiliation that would destroy forever the basis for future coexistence between erstwhile enemy communities.

There are many examples of such a value system in many other societies around the world. But today, to paraphrase the poet William Butler Yeats, things have fallen apart; the moral centre is no longer holding. In so many conflicts today, anything goes. Children, women, the elderly, granary stores, crops and livestock — all are fair game in the single-minded struggle for power, in the attempt not just to prevail but to humiliate, not just to subdue but to annihilate the enemy community altogether. This is the phenomenon of total war.

Tragically, many societies that have experienced prolonged periods of conflict have seen their local value systems collapse under its pressure. I believe that such a society must, in the first place, draw from the deep well of its own tradition a renewed sense of ethical rootedness. This can then be related and linked with the norms that have been developed at the international level. We must ensure, in that context, that the institutions that traditionally inculcate values — parents, the extended family, elders, teachers, schools and religious institutions — are strengthened. It is only in this way that a society caught in the throes of a deep moral crisis can regain its moral bearings.

A third area of engagement has to do with exploring concrete initiatives to prevent or mitigate the suffering of children who are actually caught up in the midst of ongoing violence.

First, with regard to access to populations in distress, when communities are cut off from the outside world, when they are out of sight, they are entirely at the mercy of the belligerents. That is when they are the most vulnerable; that is when gross abuse and atrocities are likely to occur and multiply. For this reason, the international community must insist on having access to such communities. Humanitarian relief agencies and human rights organizations must be given access to populations in distress, to provide relief and succour, to bear impartial witness and to draw attention to rules and norms applicable to the conduct of war.

The international community must also insist that facilities normally reserved for children or which have a significant presence of children — facilities such as schools, hospitals, children's playgrounds and school buses — should be considered battle-free zones.

With regard to the recruitment and participation of children in hostilities, children simply have no role in warfare. The international community should insist on this fundamental principle and therefore seek firm commitments from belligerents neither to recruit nor to use children in hostilities.

Finally, there is a need to monitor and control more carefully the flow of arms — especially small arms — into theatres of conflict where children are being systematically brutalized and abused. Similarly, greater effort must be made to prevent the supply and use of landmines in such theatres of conflict.

We now live in a world in which interdependence has become a central fact of international life. The various armed groups also depend in no small measure on the goodwill of the wider international community, from which they seek political legitimacy and diplomatic recognition and on which they depend for the flow of arms and money to prosecute their war efforts. In our interdependent world, no group, no Government and no entity could ignore concerted international pressure in favour of the protection of children.

A fourth area of engagement concerns the needs of children after conflict has ended. When war is over, it is not really over for the children for whom the culture of violence has become a way of life; nor for the children left carrying deep scars in their hearts and minds; nor for the children who have simply lost out altogether on their education and youth. In the aftermath of conflict, we must work to heal these wounds. Healing is important to restore spiritual, emotional and physical health. Healing is necessary to facilitate reintegration into society. But healing is also critical, because without it, it is difficult to break the cycle of violence. Without healing, the victims of today's abuse may become the abusers of tomorrow; without healing, the wounded children of today could become the channel for transmitting violence from one generation to the next. This is the reason why

any plans for post-conflict peace-building should make the needs of children a central concern from the outset, not merely an afterthought after the fact.

In this context, some of the issues requiring concerted action by national Governments, as well as the international community, should include the demobilization and reintegration of child combatants; the treatment of psychological trauma; the return and resettlement of displaced and refugee children; mine clearance and the development and rehabilitation of children affected by mines; and the provision and rehabilitation of basic medical and educational services, including vocational training. These are some of the areas requiring concerted action.

Lastly, a fifth area of engagement concerns the need for taking preventive action. This means addressing the very conditions that give rise to conflicts in the first place: political exclusion and gross disparities in the distribution of resources between different regions and different sectors of the same country. We must work to transform these distorted relationships. Both international and national actors need to take political, economic and social measures that can generate within communities a sense of hope in place of despair, a sense of inclusion and participation instead of exclusion, a sense of belonging instead of alienation, a sense of one country instead of centre and periphery.

In addition to these specific areas, I would request that when the Council considers the imposition of sanctions it especially take into account the needs of children, their impact on children and how best to protect them in those circumstances. I would also hope that whenever the Security Council considers peacemaking efforts, peacekeeping mandates and peace-building plans, the central needs of children will be there from the outset and will inform the plans and the way.

In conclusion, let me say that I have a deep fear, a nightmare scenario, that we may be exposed to so much that we are in danger of accepting as normal what in fact represents a radical departure from any acceptable norms at both the local and the international level. I would hope that, beginning with the message that the Council will send forth today, we may resolve as we enter the new millennium, regardless of our cultural traditions, religious affiliation, political ideologies, to agree on a common project: to make our world one that is safe for children — all of our children.

I wish to thank you, Mr. President and members of the Council for your commitment and concern about the plight of children affected by war all over the world.

The President: I thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for his kind words addressed to me and to Security Council members.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of El Salvador, Latvia, Romania and Ukraine, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Castaneda-Cornejo (El Salvador), Mr. Priedkalns (Latvia), Mr. Gorita (Romania) and Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

Sir John Weston (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia — and the associated country Cyprus, as well as the European Free Trade Association country members of the European Economic Area, Iceland and Liechtenstein, align themselves with this statement.

On behalf of the European Union, I would like to express strong support for the role of the Special Representative as advocate for the protection of children affected by armed conflict and to commend him for the inspiring address he has just delivered. The suggestions he has made deserve our careful consideration.

The casualties of modern armed conflicts are overwhelmingly civilians rather than soldiers. Among civilians, women and children are particularly vulnerable, and consequently they are now among the principal victims of war. As we have already heard, it has been estimated that in the last decade alone, 2 million children have been killed in armed conflict, 6 million seriously

injured or disabled, 1 million have been orphaned and some 12 million have been left homeless. Many others have fallen victim to disease, deprivation, recruitment for combat, systematic sexual abuse and gender-based violence. Anti-personnel landmines and small arms have a particularly devastating effect on children. That children should be among the principal victims of armed conflict is unacceptable.

The European Union believes that the issue of children and armed conflict is one which deserves a particularly important place on the international political agenda. While we recognize that the primary responsibility to protect the rights of the child under all circumstances rests with States, we must also reinvigorate international efforts to protect children. We must ensure the demobilization of child soldiers and also recognize the importance of action to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of the child victims of conflict. The international community must ensure that adequate resources are devoted to child rehabilitation programmes as an integral part of planning for post-conflict situations. European Union development policy already addresses the plight of children in armed conflicts. In some specific situations — for example, Sierra Leone — we are focusing our efforts on the demobilizing and reintegration of child soldiers.

The European Union supports the work that is in progress to strengthen international human rights standards and mechanisms for enforcing international law in respect of children in situations of armed conflict. The European Union remains fully committed to the aim of concluding successfully the negotiations on the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The European Union is working actively at the Diplomatic Conference for the early establishment of a permanent international criminal court. We believe strongly that an international criminal court is necessary as a means of holding the perpetrators of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity to account. We support inclusion in the international criminal court statute of a prohibition against the use of children in armed conflict.

The European Union is also concerned that whenever sanctions are imposed in the handling of crises, their impact on children should be assessed and monitored, and humanitarian exceptions should be child-focused.

Ensuring that human rights and humanitarian instruments set adequate standards for the protection of children in conflict situations is not enough by itself to safeguard children's interests. The binding commitments that these instruments entail must be implemented by all. In that regard, the European Union stresses the particular importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been almost universally ratified. It is the responsibility of the international community to ensure that all sides involved in conflict — governmental and non-governmental — abide by the relevant principles of international law in their treatment of children. The European Union gives its full support to the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to its mandate to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all States parties, including those affected by armed conflict.

Any meaningful effort to improve the plight of children affected by armed conflict requires high-level governmental and international attention, it requires the mobilization of public opinion, it requires practical action on the ground by Governments, and it requires Governments to support the activities of the Special Representative. The European Union supported fully the excellent work of the independent Expert, Ms. Graca Machel, and was actively involved in the creation of the new post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Several European Union member States have made voluntary contributions to the work of the Special Representative. The European Union underlines the need for a close partnership between the Special Representative and other parts of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Special Representative has demonstrated in his visits to countries in conflict — Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sudan — that efforts to raise the visibility of children's suffering can bring results. It is possible to get significant commitments on the treatment of children in situations of conflict. It is important that Governments and armed groups fulfil commitments given to the Special Representative. The international community must be vigilant in monitoring implementation of these commitments.

The Presidency of the European Union held, in London on 22 and 23 June, a high-level symposium on children affected by armed conflict, co-hosted by the Special Representative. Participants resolved to use their

influence to put pressure on all Governments to live up to their commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant instruments of international law. Among other conclusions, participants agreed on the need for an integrated approach to assist countries emerging from conflict and for a network of support for the Special Representative's appeal for resurrecting local norms and values that protect children from abuse in armed conflict.

The European Union looks forward to working closely with the Special Representative and relevant United Nations bodies on the development of this agenda.

Mr. Türk (Slovenia): I wish to begin by paying tribute to you, Sir, and to the delegation of Portugal for your efforts which made today's discussion possible. I also wish to recognize the presence of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and express our appreciation for his statement, for his analysis and, perhaps most importantly, for the recommendations he offered to the Security Council.

There are many reasons why it has become necessary for the Security Council to hold an open debate on the fate of children in armed conflict. Among the problems relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, none has the same urgency and the same long-term importance as the one being discussed today. The efforts of a number of United Nations organs and agencies and, as of recently, those of Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, to alleviate the plight of children in armed conflict and to solve a variety of problems affecting children in such situations deserve the recognition and support of the Security Council. They deserve our support both for their inherent humanitarian value and for their contribution to the international endeavours for peace and security.

Two years ago, in her seminal report on the impact of armed conflicts on children, Ms. Graça Machel, the Expert appointed by the Secretary-General, defined the problem of children in armed conflict as "the attack on children". The dimensions of the problem were described in the most dramatic terms. According to that report, in the past decade an estimated two million children have been killed in armed conflicts. Three times as many have been seriously injured or permanently disabled, many of them maimed by landmines. Countless others have been forced to witness or even take part in horrifying acts of violence.

Many contemporary armed conflicts take place over extremely protracted periods of time. The consequences of such conflicts are devastating for children. In addition to the immediate effects of violence, such conflicts deprive entire generations of the benefits of security, adequate health care and, above all, education. Entire generations are being victimized and their prospects for normal life destroyed.

In a recent report on Sierra Leone, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General explained that one of the most pressing challenges facing that country today is what he described as the crisis of the youth - the plight of children affected directly or indirectly by conflict. The manifestations of the impact of prolonged conflict on children include the phenomena of street children, child combatants, displaced children, orphans, victims of atrocities and the collapse of health and educational services. It was striking, as reported by the Special Representative, that very many people expressed their alarm at the erosion of local value systems within society, especially among the youth.

This brings us to the core of the problem. As Graça Machel emphasized in her report, while the statistics on the suffering of children in armed conflict are shocking enough, even more chilling is the conclusion drawn from them:

> "More and more of the world is being sucked into a desolate moral vacuum. This is a space devoid of the most basic human values; a space in which children are slaughtered, raped, and maimed; a space in which children are exploited as soldiers; a space in which children are starved and exposed to extreme brutality. Such unregulated terror and violence speak of deliberate victimization. There are few further depths to which humanity can sink." (*A/51/306, para.3*)

The contrast between such reality and the normative precepts which are supposed to protect children in armed conflicts is particularly appalling, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General today explained the stark contrast between reality and local values and customs. The reality of the deliberate victimization of children seems to deny the relevance of some of the basic principles of humanitarian law pertaining to the protection of civilian populations in armed conflicts. Moreover, the situation has worsened precisely at the time of the conclusion, entry into force and beginning of the almost universal applicability of the United Nations Convention

on the Rights of the Child, which contains some of the most detailed norms that are supposed to protect children.

It is clear that serious reflection needs to be given to these problems and that urgent action must be taken. In this context, we wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for the appointment of Mr. Olara Otunnu as his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflicts. As the results of the first missions of the Special Representative have shown, it is possible to make a difference in specific situations, including the most difficult. The Security Council must extend its full support to the Secretary-General and to his Special Representative. In the same spirit, the Security Council must also extend its support to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other organs, agencies and organizations which strive to ameliorate the situation of children in armed conflict.

In addition, the Security Council must ask the question of what needs to be done and can be done by the Council itself. This is a question that the Council cannot avoid; for it to do so would mean that the Council is unable to face some of its basic responsibilities in the domain of the maintenance of international peace and security under the Charter of the United Nations. Let us not forget that the Charter defines the responsibility of the Security Council as an organ which acts on behalf the entire membership of the United Nations. Moreover, its action must be in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter. The Security Council is defined in the Charter as a collective body with important collective responsibilities for our common peace and security. Therefore, its action must transcend the narrowly defined national interests of its members and be aimed at securing, to the maximum extent possible, the attainment of the common good.

At least four important conclusions or implications of practical relevance arise from the essential character and purpose of the Security Council.

First, the Council must not be neutral or indifferent when the fundamental values of human survival are at stake. The Council must therefore express a clear position and ensure that its practical action is in conformity with the requirements of international law and the basic, universally shared moral imperatives. While it must be understood that the Council cannot always provide solutions, let alone enforce them, it must be equally clear that its action is intended to achieve the maximum possible.

Secondly, the Council should not be allowed to become an obstacle to the efforts pursued by the United Nations Member States that wish to improve the network of international cooperation so as to prevent and punish atrocities against children and others victimized in armed conflicts.

Here, an additional comment is in order. The ethical vacuum which is characterized by the breakdown of the basic norms of international law and of traditional norms and social codes of behaviour calls for urgent action. The necessary change is not possible without the minimum retribution, which alone can break the cycle of impunity. States must act individually and collectively to achieve that goal. In addition to the efforts of states acting individually through their national systems of justice and through mutual cooperation, an effective international justice system has become necessary.

Slovenia is deeply committed to that task and is actively participating at the Conference on the establishment of an international criminal court, which is currently being held in Rome. We hope that the Conference will succeed in establishing an effective and meaningful international court with the relevant competence to try persons responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes which victimize children. The role of the Security Council in such an international justice system must be that of enforcer, a factor for the credibility of justice, not that of political decision maker, which could cast doubt on the independence and impartiality of justice.

Thirdly, innovative approaches to the question of types of action by the Security Council need to be explored. The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict can help in devising such approaches. The proposal of the Special Representative to make Sierra Leone a pilot project for a more concerted and effective response to the needs of children affected by war offers an important example in that regard. The Special Representative identified a number of clearly defined priority tasks. This will certainly help the Security Council in its decision-making when addressing the situation in Sierra Leone. It would be useful for the Security Council to develop a continuous and meaningful dialogue with the Special Representative and periodically evaluate the progress made.

Among the priority tasks for Sierra Leone, the Special Representative emphasized the need to address

the problems of recruitment and demobilization of children under the age of 18 and the treatment of child combatants. While the issues of demobilization represent a standard aspect of many situations dealt with by the Security Council, the idea of giving a priority to the issue of child soldiers requires special attention. My delegation firmly supports the approach taken by the Special Representative. We also believe that by giving priority to practical action in addressing the issue of child soldiers, the Special Representative and the Security Council could make an important contribution to international efforts in that domain. We support the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to address the problem of child soldiers. If the Security Council proves effective in addressing specific situations, it will also help the larger cause of curtailing the practice of exploiting children as soldiers.

The fourth and final implication relates to the needs most directly associated with the powers of the Security Council. In the recent past there have been situations in which children have become victims of abuse and prostitution following the arrival of peacekeeping forces. In half of the situations studied by Graça Machel, the arrival of peacekeeping troops was associated with a rapid growth of child prostitution. We welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to prevent the recurrence of such phenomena. The Security Council must give its full support to these efforts and ensure that peacekeeping forces observe the rules of international law. International personnel must be protected by international law. At the same time, it must be clear that war crimes and crimes against humanity will be prosecuted irrespective of the status of the perpetrators.

I would like to conclude my statement by saying that the discussion today is timely and necessary. The delegation of Slovenia participated actively in the preparation of the presidential statement, and we hope that it will be adopted soon.

The President: I thank the representative of Slovenia for his kind words addressed to me and to my delegation.

Mr. Dahlgren (Sweden): Let me first say that I associate myself fully with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union.

It is, indeed, appalling to learn how children of all ages are affected by armed conflict. They are recruited into armed combat — often by force, and sometimes by desperation when societies are falling apart. They are forced to kill, to torture and to humiliate other human beings, sometimes even other children. Children are killed or severely injured and end up disabled, deprived of their future. In armed conflicts the principal victims are always the weakest ones: civilians rather than soldiers, children rather than grown-ups.

Children witness atrocities committed against their families, neighbours and friends. The social fabric of families, schools and society is torn apart. Child refugees are all too often deprived of their rights to education. Children in refugee camps, in particular girls, are vulnerable to violence and sexual abuse.

These outright breaches of established global norms of humanitarianism and human rights, in particular concerning children, that we witness in many conflicts today constitute a threat to peace, stability and development, within societies as well as between them.

The statement made this morning in the Security Council by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was an excellent start for what we hope will be a recurring contact on this important issue. His programme of work and his stated priorities for action demonstrate an agenda of significant humanitarian and political importance. In discharging our duties with regard to international peace and security, there are also a number of things that we in the Security Council can do with regard to the protection of children in armed conflict.

Let me raise some points of particular importance to us, areas where my Government feels that the Security Council, the United Nations as a whole and the international community should act. First, children must be kept out of acts of armed conflict. The age of 18 should be the minimum age of recruitment and participation in military activities. An optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child could achieve this. Sweden welcomes the new mandate of the Chairperson of the working group of the Commission on Human Rights on the draft of such a protocol to hold broad informal consultations on how to break the present stalemate in the work of the group.

Secondly, the Security Council should give particular consideration to the need for demobilization and rehabilitation, as well as the physical and social reintegration of child soldiers and child combatants in post-conflict peace-building operations.

Thirdly, as others have said, landmines kill, hurt and disable children at work or at play. Children constitute a major part of the civilian victims of landmines. Sweden welcomes the new mandate of the United Nations Children's Fund to work on mine-awareness programmes. We would also like to emphasize the importance of the catalytic role of the Special Representative in the prevention and rehabilitation of child victims. But for a lasting solution to this menace, it is evident that the Ottawa agreement on landmines must be fully implemented.

Fourthly, small arms are increasingly available, including to children, with disastrous consequences. Restricting the supply of small arms in areas of conflict is a necessary step in halting armed conflicts and their harmful impact on children.

Fifthly, the Security Council should pay attention to the importance of special training for peacekeepers and civilian police who while on mission will come into contact with child combatants or children who have been abused. This is also an important task for the Special Representative in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Peacekeepers and civilian police should be well versed in international humanitarian law and human rights, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Sweden welcomes the initiative of the Special Representative to form a joint working group with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Sixthly, the Special Representative should also continue to keep track of crimes against children in the context of armed conflict. He should be able to alert the international criminal court, once it is established, as well as the international community at large. Political actors should know from the outset what kind of consequences they will face if they take part in these types of crimes. Impunity for crimes against humanity, and in particular crimes against vulnerable children, cannot be accepted.

Lastly, particular attention must also be paid to how children are affected by the humanitarian consequences of sanctions. It is our view that sanctions should be designed in such a way that negative humanitarian consequences on vulnerable groups, in particular children, are minimized and that the appropriate humanitarian exemptions are made.

The issue before us today is of relevance to the work of the Security Council in yet another way. The impact of armed conflict on children — the generation on which all our future relations depend — will also influence the way they will settle their disputes and conflicts. To build a foundation for a peaceful world where violence and war will no longer be used as a means for settling disputes and conflicts, children's education is important and should emphasize the values of peace, tolerance, understanding and dialogue. In this regard, we all are teachers.

We have witnessed throughout the years the arduous process of bringing about sustainable peace and reconciliation in the many civil wars and conflicts of our time. Even if it is not easy, a grown-up soldier can return to the life he had before the war — to farm his own piece of land, to take up his previous profession, to reconcile, hopefully, with his neighbours. But a child, who might have lost both parents and who has been prevented from going to school, growing up instead amid violence and fear, has nothing to return to. His or her only skill, perhaps, is handling a weapon. Only with strong support from parents or foster-parents, teachers and other adults can this damage be repaired. But there is a risk that these children will continue to live the only lives they know: to obey orders and to kill, this time as criminals in their own countries. That is why the recruitment and use of children for armed conflicts is not only a violation of international law and the rights of the child, but could also have serious consequences for peace and security in the future.

In 1990 the World Summit for Children was held here in New York. It brought together more Heads of State and Government than had ever assembled before, and those leaders agreed among themselves to work carefully to protect children from the scourge of war and to take measures to prevent further armed conflicts, in order to give children everywhere a peaceful and secure future. That pledge will need to be continuously renewed as long as children continue to suffer in armed conflicts. The Special Representative has a very important mission in that field, but all of us, including the Council, have a responsibility to meet that commitment.

Mr. Dejammet (France) (*interpretation from French*): This debate shows clearly how well-founded was your initiative, Mr. President. In this context, we associate ourselves with those who have thanked you for preparing, with the support of the members of the Council, a statement on children in armed conflict, which we will soon be adopting. This is a very welcome move.

Many figures and statistics have already been mentioned that clearly illustrate the seriousness of the problem that we face. I will confine myself, therefore, to

underscoring the truly overwhelming nature of the facts that attest to the very high numbers of children who are forcibly recruited as combatants, both in regular armies and in armed groups. This is a particularly deplorable phenomenon, and we must do our utmost to eradicate it.

The question we are dealing with is therefore very serious and multifaceted. It warrants that every effort be effectively deployed to reverse the tremendously disquieting trend of involving children in armed conflict.

From the very outset, France supported the idea put forward by the Secretary-General to give a mandate to a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and we welcome the appointment to this post of Mr. Olara Otunnu. All of us at the United Nations are familiar with his dedication, energy and effectiveness. I wish therefore simply to reaffirm our support for his work and to voice the strong hope that, in view of the magnitude and the implications of his mandate, the Special Representative will receive the whole-hearted and active cooperation of all entities of the United Nations system. Almost all of these are concerned by the question of children in armed conflict, but I should like to mention in particular the United Nations Children's Fund, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the High Commissioner for Refugees. Mr. Otunnu should likewise also be able to rely on the cooperation of Governments and non-governmental entities.

France fully endorses the provisions contained in the presidential statement that we will be adopting, in particular with respect to protection for humanitarian assistance, the need to take into consideration the humanitarian impact of sanctions, the importance of developing and implementing programmes tailored to the needs of children, in particular in the area of their social reintegration and rehabilitation.

I listened very attentively to the various points made so forcefully by previous speakers, all of which, it appears, deserve our support. But I should like to draw the Council's attention to one element that seems particularly urgent and important: the need for universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, of course, the need for its effective implementation. We hope that the efforts undertaken to conclude an additional optional protocol to the Convention, which will specifically address the question of children in armed conflict, will bear fruit at the earliest possible date.

We have witnessed in the various United Nations bodies all the positive consequences of the determination of delegations to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We are fully aware of the vigilance and dynamism the Committee on the Rights of the Child has shown in that area. I believe, therefore, that we must mobilize our efforts to take specific steps to conclude that additional protocol relating to children in armed conflict. In my view, this would be the first positive and felicitous result of the presidential statement that we will be adopting, and I wish once again to thank you, Sir, for having taken this initiative on behalf of the delegations that are members of the Council.

The President: I thank the representative of France for the kind words he addressed to me.

Mr. Zmeevski (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): In using its prerogative under the Charter of the United Nations to deal with numerous conflicts in various parts of the world, the Security Council cannot fail to react to one of the ugliest aspects of those conflicts: the growing involvement of children in the armed confrontations of competing States and factions.

Children, more than any other segment of the population, suffer from every aspect of war, and in particular from the indiscriminate use of mines. Leaders of military factions are using children ever more frequently in armed conflicts as cannon fodder. Over the years of political chaos and armed struggle in Afghanistan, Somalia and other countries, a whole generation of young people has grown up who know nothing of school, books or children's toys, but who have an excellent knowledge of sophisticated weaponry.

In its consideration of specific conflict situations, the Security Council must devote more attention to the problems of children, and must do so in a result-oriented manner. In our view, reports of the Secretary-General on any armed conflict should include a section on the status of children, as should briefings by his representatives to the Council. We should also ensure that agreements between parties to a conflict, including those involving the assistance of the United Nations — whether a simple ceasefire or a comprehensive settlement — contain specific provisions on alleviating the plight of children, on their withdrawal from the most dangerous zones and on ensuring access for humanitarian assistance; in the case of child soldiers there should also be provisions on accelerating the process of demobilization and reintegration into normal life, on access to education and

on acquiring a civilian job. These tasks should be assigned to and be given particular attention by the relevant special representative of the Secretary-General and United Nations peacekeeping command.

A separate, and important, issue is sanctions. Before imposing and implementing sanctions regimes, there must be an evaluation of their harmful impact on children, and humanitarian exceptions must be permitted for children who are victims of conflicts, with a view to minimizing their impact.

All these measures can be carried out within existing mandates and procedures, without any special decisions. There can be no comprehensive solution to the problem of children in armed conflict without drawing on the whole range of measures available to the United Nations. Relying on the collective will of its Members, the United Nations must erect reliable barriers to the increasing involvement of the young generation in armed conflict.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly in 1989 and to which 191 Governments have acceded, addresses the problem of children in international armed conflicts. Moreover, there are other international legal norms pertaining to children and urging the adoption of all possible measures to ensure the protection of children affected by armed conflicts, and to care for them by assisting with the physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration of children who have become victims of armed conflict.

Russia was among the first to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is working tirelessly to implement the recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. We strongly condemn the unlawful use of children in armed conflict, and we believe that those guilty of this must be prosecuted. We advocate the formulation of new, effective instruments in this sphere, notably an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

Both at the national and at the international levels, we must devise a broad spectrum of preventive measures, including training relevant personnel and disseminating knowledge on how to deal with children who are victims of armed conflict and on their rights, needs and interests, as well as on existing legal norms in this sphere. I hope that today's debate will lend the necessary momentum to this endeavour.

We highly value the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Otunnu, and believe that the ideas he set out today deserve full consideration and inclusion in the activities of the United Nations.

Mr. Owada (Japan): This meeting of the Security Council has been convened expressly to address the issue of children in armed conflict. As such, it is unprecedented in the history of the Security Council. That the Council has felt it necessary to address this issue is testimony to a tragic situation, in which so many children are falling victim to armed conflicts in many parts of the world today. The members of the Council understand that this situation has profound implications for the problem of the maintenance of international peace and security, and thus demands the urgent attention of the Council. I should like to commend you, Mr. President, for your initiative on this important matter.

With the shift in recent years in the nature of armed conflicts from inter-State to intra-State fighting, the number of children involved in and falling victim to armed conflicts has increased dramatically. With the proliferation of small arms in the hands of groups engaged in intra-State fighting, the character of such armed conflicts has also drastically changed, inflicting devastating harm upon innocent civilians, and especially children. It is now incumbent upon the international community to make serious efforts to cope with this problem. In addition to addressing this intolerable humanitarian situation, we have to pay special attention to its long-term negative implications for the future generations of our society, as well as to its immediate impact upon the process of post-conflict peace-building. In addressing the issue of children in armed conflict, the Council should demonstrate its determination to place the issue at the centre of its strategy in conflict prevention and post-conflict peace-building, to be tackled in a comprehensive manner.

The Government of Japan has long stressed that children, who are our society's hope for the future and thus its most precious resource, are also its most vulnerable elements. The situation in which children in many parts of the world are being deprived of their right to grow up and live in a peaceful society where they are entitled to a life free from persecution and violence must be addressed as an issue of utmost importance to all members of the international community. Children who have been traumatized by armed conflicts frequently suffer lasting and debilitating economic, social and

psychological effects, even when their lives are spared and no physical harm is inflicted. Those children require compassionate, skilled and ongoing care, and the international community has to see to it that such care is given, because it is to children that the task of post-conflict nation-building will fall.

I wish to offer the high tribute of the Government of Japan to the dedication and commitment of Mr. Olara Otunnu, who has recognized the importance of this task and accepted the responsibility of serving as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. He has been successful in drawing our attention to the most difficult situations that children in armed conflicts are encountering in such places as Sudan and Sierra Leone. His responsibilities for raising the awareness of society on this question, promoting the public dissemination of information about the plight of children and offering ways and means to combat the problem are extremely important.

The inspiring statement that we have just heard from him points to the critical importance that we have to attach to this problem. The concrete suggestions he made are worthy of careful consideration on the part of all of us. I sincerely hope that he will be eminently successful in playing this critical role of advocacy, which will help expedite the efforts of the United Nations system to cope with this urgent problem. However, the success of his work requires more than his personal efforts. It is essential that the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and all other relevant United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, extend to him their full support and cooperation. It is essential also that international bodies working in this area coordinate their own efforts on behalf of children with those of this new office.

On that understanding, I am happy to announce at this time that in recognition of the importance of this mission carried out by Mr. Otunnu and his office, the Government of Japan intends to contribute $100,000 to support the start of this very important office of Children and Armed Conflict. Furthermore, I should like to state that we in Japan are willing to host, in cooperation with the office of Mr. Otunnu and other relevant United Nations organizations and agencies, a public international symposium in Tokyo on the issue of children in armed conflict in the context of situations in our part of the world.

The involvement of child soldiers in armed conflicts is an issue which particularly demands our urgent attention. In many recent intra-State conflicts and civil war situations in Africa and elsewhere, children in their early teens, who under normal circumstances should be enjoying their time on the playground, have often been seen on the battleground engaged in killing their opposite numbers with machine guns and other lethal weapons.

Japan urges all parties to armed conflicts to strictly observe article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions prohibiting children under 15 years of age from being used as soldiers. Japan is convinced that we should go further and pursue the goal that no child under the age of 18 will be recruited and used in armed conflict. Japan is participating in the working group for the addition to this effect of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Japan is also deeply concerned about the plight of children who have fallen victim to anti-personnel landmines. In order for our children in the twenty-first century to live free from the fear of landmines, we in Japan have been promoting a "zero-victim programme", aimed at enhancing demining activities, providing assistance to mine victims and seeking a universal and effective ban on landmines. As a country which signed in December 1997 the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and is currently working toward its ratification, Japan specifically urges that the current consultations at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva make further progress towards the early commencement of negotiations for a treaty to ban the export of all landmines.

In view of the cardinal importance of saving children from the scourge of armed conflicts and other hazardous environments, the Government of Japan has been extending cooperation through bilateral assistance, grants for small-scale grass-roots projects and support for non-governmental organization activities that aim to provide educational opportunities and improve the health and nutrition of children affected by armed conflicts. It has also extended and will continue to extend such cooperation through relevant international organizations, including the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF),

the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In the area of demining and victim assistance, my Government announced last year its contribution of 10 billion yen to be disbursed over the next five years, and I sincerely hope that this will have a positive effect on a reduction in the number of children who fall victim to landmines, as well as on the rehabilitation and social reintegration of child victims.

Another important aspect of the problems involved is the unintended adverse consequences of sanctions on the civilian population, especially on its most vulnerable sectors, such as children. General Assembly resolution 51/242 prescribes that foodstuffs, medicines and medical supplies should be exempted from the United Nations sanctions regimes and that the sanctions committees should give priority to handling applications for the supply of humanitarian goods for the civilian population. The efforts to promote the elaboration of sanctions in such a way as to focus specifically on the targeted regime without producing negative effects on the civilian population, including innocent children, should be further pursued. Japan intends to be actively involved in this process.

Let me conclude by expressing my Governments appreciation to such international organizations as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNICEF, UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and ICRC, as well as numerous non-governmental organizations, for their tireless efforts to protect children in situations of armed conflict and to promote their welfare. In closing, I wish to stress once again the importance of the mission that Mr. Otunnu and his staff are undertaking and to express my sincere wish that Mr. Otunnu will succeed in giving tangible hope to those children currently living in despair. We in the international community must spare no effort to ensure the right of children everywhere to live in peace, for it is on children that our future depends.

The President: I thank the representative of Japan for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Amorim (Brazil): The situation of children affected by armed conflict is one which presents the international community and the United Nations with a serious and urgent challenge. We have reached a consensus in identifying this topic as one of grave concern. But the dire predicament of the young whose future is being ravaged by war requires not only enhanced international awareness but, most of all, a strategy capable of acting as a shield to protect children and adolescents from the physical and psychological traumas provoked by cycles of violence. I think Mr. Olara Otunnu has offered today some of the elements for such a strategy.

We are grateful to Ms. Graça Machel for having disseminated a groundbreaking and comprehensive report on the multiple ways in which children are abused and brutalized in situations of armed conflict. Other timely initiatives ensued. The establishment of a working group of the Commission on Human Rights to negotiate a protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding the involvement of children in armed conflict represents an important effort to deal with this pressing issue. More recently, the appointment of Mr. Olara Otunnu as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict has contributed to focusing increased attention on this critical problem, while raising expectations that effective measures will be devised for dealing with it.

Mr. Otunnu has already proved to be an impressive advocate for our cause, judging not only from the enlightened passion that he has devoted to the subject, but also from the several commitments he has been able to extract with a view to safeguarding the rights of children in areas of conflict he has personally visited.

Brazil will continue to lend its firmest support to such initiatives and welcomes the possibility offered by this debate to associate the authority of the Security Council with Mr. Otunnus endeavours. It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that the role of the Security Council in this context must be placed in a wider perspective that will allow for fruitful and mutually reinforcing coordination with the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, whose competence and responsibilities must be preserved. We strongly encourage Mr. Otunnu to develop a substantive dialogue with those bodies. We are convinced that both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have an important and, indeed, an irreplaceable role to play in relation to some tasks the Special Representative mentioned today, such as education, rehabilitation and post-conflict peace-building, as well as in addressing the value structure that has been tragically reversed. The humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council can offer an opportunity for such a dialogue.

It is our belief, on the other hand, that the Council, when discharging its functions in matters related to international security, should address questions such as the disarmament and demobilization of child soldiers and the recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts, as well as the role of peacekeeping personnel in this regard. The Security Council must also be mindful of the impact of sanctions on the civilian population and, above all, on children, in line with General Assembly resolution 51/242.

But as we address the tragedy of children affected by armed conflict, we must not forget that the use of indiscriminate weapons, such as landmines, is one of the biggest causes of death and maiming among children. We should pursue our efforts to ban such weapons, as well as all weapons of mass destruction. We should also pay attention to the flow of arms — especially light or small arms — which are to be put in the hands of children.

If we are to secure a better world for future generations, where peace and understanding will prevail, we cannot fail to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict. By doing so we will be helping to ensure that today's victim does not become tomorrow's aggressor, through the promotion of the values on which the United Nations has built its foundation. There can be no better cause for investing the political and material resources of this Organization than that of assisting the sons and daughters of belligerence to survive the pain and devastation of conflict in order to become instruments of peace.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Otunnu, at this open debate of the Security Council on children in armed conflict, as well as his important statement.

The question of protecting children in armed conflict has been a matter of concern for various countries and bodies, such as the United Nations General Assembly. At present, there still exist armed conflicts in many places that not only endanger international peace and security but also bring tremendous damage to the peoples of the countries and regions concerned. As one of the most vulnerable social groups, children are particularly hurt by armed conflicts.

In the armed conflicts around the world, tens of millions people have lost their homes and become displaced. They have neither a stable life nor an opportunity to receive an education. On top of that, they are constantly subjected to violent attacks that cause tremendous damage to their mental and physical health. What is more, millions of children have been forcibly recruited as combatants, thus becoming directly involved in armed conflicts.

Children represent the future of our world. The international community should give special attention to the question of protecting children in armed conflict. The fundamental way to protect children in armed conflict is to effectively prevent, halt and eliminate armed conflicts. Under present circumstances, where it is not possible to fully accomplish this, we should urge the parties concerned to end their conflicts as soon as possible through peaceful means, whenever and wherever those armed conflicts occur. We should request that they strictly observe international law — including international humanitarian law — and prevent and prohibit the various forms of violent harm done to children during conflicts. We should urge them to strive to provide children with the necessary protection and help them resume their normal lives and studies as soon as possible.

China has always attached great importance to the question of protecting children and has actively participated in the deliberations on this question in bodies such as the General Assembly. We also support the work of Ambassador Otunnu. We are in favour of the Security Council's issuing a presidential statement on the question of children affected by armed conflict, so as to demonstrate the importance that the Council attaches to this matter. At the same time, we believe that since the protection of children involves a wide range of issues, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council are the appropriate forums to carry out more comprehensive, fuller and more in-depth deliberations on this question.

Mr. Jagne (Gambia): The rightful place for a child is certainly not in the battlefield, but in the classroom or on the playground. The Graça Machel report on the impact of armed conflict on children has been an eye-opener on an issue which constitutes a cause for serious concern. With the appointment of the Secretary-General's Special Representative, children all over the world now have a public advocate whose constructive approach to the whole question, quite apart from his enthusiasm and dynamism, will, in our view, contribute in no small measure to the campaign to raise public

awareness of the problem and then, through concerted international efforts, address it in all its facets.

The first step in this direction is to stop using child soldiers, which would require States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to re-examine the Convention with a view to raising the minimum age for recruitment and participation from 15 to 18 years. It is our firm conviction that, with the necessary political will, this can be achieved. But that does not solve the problem entirely, if we take into account the persistent problem of internal conflicts and civil wars.

Experience has shown that, more often than not, under such circumstances armed groups — be they rebels, insurgents or whatever they are called — have very little or no regard whatsoever for either international law governing warfare or even their own local value systems. This is why in conflict situations they go for the easy targets — women and children, the most vulnerable group in society. What is even more painful is the fact that such armed groups usually attack civilian targets such as schools and hospitals, acts viciously calculated to inflict maximum loss of innocent lives.

My delegation is of the view that the perpetrators of atrocities against women and children should not be allowed to have a feeling of impunity. They must not go scot-free. The time has now come to bring the full force of the law upon them. It is our fervent hope that with the eventual establishment of a permanent international criminal court, those who abuse, brutalize and traumatize women and children will be snatched from any hiding place by the long arm of the law and brought to justice.

While thinking aloud on how best to deal with the perpetrators of such heinous crimes, we should at the same time give due consideration to the victims in a post-conflict recovery programme, especially the rehabilitation and reintegration of children. In this connection, my delegation supports fully the proposal by Special Representative Otunnu to start pilot projects for this purpose in post-conflict situations. He deserves the support and encouragement of all in this noble endeavour.

There is also an urgent need to address the related issue of what the Special Representative calls the crisis of youth. It will be recalled that the recent special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem revealed that youths are the main victims of the drug menace. Today, again, we are told that 90 per cent of conflict casualties around the world are civilians, of which a large and increasing number are children.

It is distressing to note that even if they are not killed, they are abused, brutalized and traumatized, or, in some cases, maimed. The situation is bad enough already to warrant a prompt response. The high-level symposium held in London recently devoted to the problem of children in armed conflict is a step in the right direction as far as the sensitization campaign is concerned. Similar meetings should be held all over the world and at regular intervals. We hope that in this way there will be renewed interest in the relevant international instruments, as well as the local norms and value systems.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to reiterate what we said during the special session on drugs about the need to protect our children. It goes without saying that children anywhere in the world are looked upon as the future of society, and they should therefore be protected by all means. We all have a common stake in doing so, and it is a responsibility that we cannot abdicate.

Mr. Sáenz Biolley (Costa Rica) (interpretation from Spanish): Let me begin by expressing to you, Mr. President, the appreciation of the Costa Rican delegation for your visionary decision to include the question of the impact of armed conflict on children on the agenda of the Security Council for this month.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express Costa Rica's full support for the work being done by the United Nations, led by our Secretary-General and with the inspiring work of Ms. Graça Machel, to prevent and mitigate the deplorable impact of armed conflict on children. In particular, my delegation would like to hail the tremendous and courageous efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, who, through his daily, tireless work has displayed a profound sense of human solidarity in his inherently difficult undertaking.

Seldom has this principal organ of the United Nations had the opportunity of holding an open debate on a topic such as this, one of highest concern to all Member States, but also one that touches the moral conscience of international society and, more generally, that of all humankind. The Council need not devote its time to a lengthy discussion of ethical values, because there can be no doubt that all Member States of the United Nations have repudiated time and again the use of

force. All of our leaders have agreed that human beings should reject armed conflict as a means to resolving their differences. In this intellectual exercise, at least, we all agree, and what is much more significant, we concur on the subject of the impact of armed conflict on the most vulnerable social sectors: women, the elderly and, in particular, children.

Nevertheless, this agreement in political discourse is adversely affected by a sorry fact that undermines all the values of human coexistence. Day by day, more and more, these vulnerable social groups are the object and the subject of the wars of the new international order. In most of today's armed conflicts, women, the elderly and particularly children are selected in a perverse way and without any moral scruples, as targets and tools of combat.

These assertions are more than mere diplomatic rhetoric. According to Ms. Machel's report, we see that in recent years more than a quarter of a million children have taken part in 30 armed conflicts around the world, that 2 million children have died in those wars, and that these wars have left between 4 million and 5 million children disabled, 12 million homeless and 1 million orphaned. These figures starkly portray a state of affairs that offends our conscience and deals a severe blow to all the political and legal efforts of the international community in favour of children. What is more, this is reliable and documented evidence that we need, as quickly as possible, to tackle the matter with wholehearted determination to identify specific measures designed not to prevent and alleviate, but to eradicate once and for all this disease that so deeply offends our conscience.

In this respect, I wish to refer to certain specific aspects. First of all, this problem must be viewed as what it is, with full awareness, from the standpoint that it represents a violations of human rights. In this regard, we stress that the Security Council should incorporate the human rights dimension in its vision of conflicts that affect international peace and security, and in particular those in which vulnerable groups, especially children, are the target and the tool of the hostilities.

Of course, this is closely bound up with the question of the vital need for international society to punish those responsible for violation of the human rights of vulnerable populations. The question of impunity must be resolved in the only possible way: by punishing those responsible. Costa Rica hopes that this vision will be clearly reflected in the negotiations currently under way in Rome with a view to establishing an international criminal court. In the same vein, Costa Rica believes it is indispensable to draw up urgently international legislation that would explicitly prohibit the recruitment of children under 18 years of age by combatant forces. My delegation lends its full support to the earliest possible conclusion of an additional protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Secondly, from this standpoint of the protection of the human rights of children affected by armed conflict, my delegation takes the view that it is essential to strengthen the preventive action of the Security Council and the United Nations system in general. In other words, we need a clear-cut approach aimed at establishing a permanent comprehensive monitoring system, under the leadership of the Secretariat and with the participation of the agencies and bodies specializing in human rights and humanitarian questions, that would facilitate the detection of possible situations of armed conflict that could affect children.

Thirdly, Costa Rica takes the view that the Security Council, whenever it adopts resolutions establishing sanctions regimes, should include measures for humanitarian safeguarding and protection designed specifically to protect these vulnerable groups. My delegation also believes that advance studies of the impact of possible sanctions on the most vulnerable populations, particularly children, should be required in advance. Of course, my delegation believes that in the field of peacekeeping operations, the Secretariat should strengthen operational capacity for addressing humanitarian situations. It is clear to everyone that the activities of members of peacekeeping operations are increasingly directed towards humanitarian protection and assistance, thus making it essential to define specific measures governing training and activities in this area. This, of course, also includes the overriding need to strengthen the mine clearance component in these peacekeeping operations.

Fourthly, from the standpoint of internal functioning, Costa Rica would like to suggest that the reports that the Secretariat presents to the Security Council for its consideration on conflicts that are a threat to international peace and security should include, of necessity, a chapter on the impact on vulnerable groups, particularly children.

Fifthly, from a more general standpoint, although still related to the Security Council, I would like to refer to questions of disarmament. There is a need quickly to establish international legal regulations designed to

resolve once and for all the problem of small and light weapons, which are the instruments used in combat by child soldiers.

Today the Security Council, under your presidency, Sir, is sending a clear signal by holding this public debate. The question of the impact of armed conflict on children is part of the agenda of international peace and security. Today the Council will also be issuing a statement that reflects without any doubt our common perception of this matter. Costa Rica hopes that the tireless efforts being made in the Secretariat and in the specialized agencies will be strengthened and bolstered by this expression of the political will and awareness of the international community on this matter, which, as I have said, deeply offends the conscience of humankind.

The President: I thank the representative of Costa Rica for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Richardson (United States of America): The United States appreciates the work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, and his commitment to improving the situation of all children affected by armed conflict. In his briefing for members of the Security Council on 11 June and in his statement today, he eloquently described the terrible impact of present-day conflicts on children, both in terms of their scale and the enormity of the abominations committed.

In today's world, with the increasing number of civil wars, international standards and principles are being swept aside. Civilian populations are often deliberately targeted and children suffer disproportionately as their families are killed or displaced. One of the most heinous developments has been the increasing use of young children in armed conflict, in violation of international law. These children face real tragedies and human rights abuses. Methods such as forced recruitment and abduction are used to mobilize children as young as 12 to participate in armed conflict, and the subsequent mistreatment they endure and the tactical manner in which they are used are deplorable. Many are wounded in both mind and body. Even if they survive their ordeal, they are often deprived of proper care and assistance, both during and after the conflict. All have suffered a severe disruption of their education and preparation for their lives as adults.

As Special Representative Otunnu noted in his briefing to members of the Security Council, it is time to exert pressure to implement the many norms that already exist to prevent the further abuse and brutalization of children. We should not be distracted by debates on the margin of the problem, but focus on where the real abuses are: with young children whose lives are totally distorted by their recruitment into armed conflict and brutality, becoming both perpetrators and victims who are often drugged to make them comply.

The United States strenuously condemns this use of children in armed conflict in a manner that violates international law, and it actively supports international efforts to curb this practice.

The United States also provides support for programmes to rehabilitate affected children through counselling, reconciliation, education and vocational training in the hope that these methods will facilitate the reintegration of these children into civilian society, help them to readjust to being children, and prepare them to lead peaceful and constructive lives. We support the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund in these areas. Because of the particular vulnerability of refugee and internally displaced children, the United States is working with UNHCR to strengthen its infrastructure and activities in order to better address the special protection and assistance needs of refugee children. The people of the United States support numerous international and non-governmental organizations whose work contributes to alleviating the suffering of children affected by hostilities.

The United States places the highest priority on assisting children throughout the world and will continue to work with the Governments, United Nations agencies, international and non-governmental organizations and other partners that have the specific responsibility and expertise to address the difficult and tragic problem of the exploitation of children as soldiers. Today's children are tomorrow's hope. We must all work to ensure that hope is not extinguished by their participation in armed conflict.

Mr. Mahugu (Kenya): My delegation welcomes the opportunity to participate in this open debate on this important subject and joins the consensus in thanking you, Sir, for your initiative in convening it. We also express our appreciation for the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, my brother Ambassador Olara Otunnu. His statement this morning was indeed very inspiring to all of

us and his recommendations, in our view, warrant the Council's special attention.

The issue of children in armed conflict is of particular interest to Africa, where there has been an increase in the number of horror stories about the atrocities to which children are subject or in which they participate. It is estimated, as has been said by others, that some 300,000 children under the age of 18 are currently involved in armed conflict situations around the world. For this reason, we shall remain supportive of the continued efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to address the plight of such children and we look forward to seeing a positive outcome to his work in all parts of the world, and particularly in Africa.

I recall that when the Security Council was addressing the post-conflict peace-building strategy for Liberia in 1997, it expressed concern about the involvement of children in armed conflict situations. It further pointed out the importance of integrating such children into society. For this reason, we are happy to note that Ambassador Otunnu's efforts in post-conflict Sierra Leone appear to be proceeding along similar lines.

We are aware of the existence of armed labour in parts of the Central African region and are concerned about the possibility that children could be involved in these activities. There is the added dimension of the easy availability of illegal small arms, and both of these phenomena have the potential to destabilize the whole region.

Children are our future and we shall continue to support the work of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative so that we do not jeopardize the chances of our most precious investment. It is especially disheartening to hear about the ongoing exploitation of children, whether by recruitment into armed groups, sexual abuse, abduction or forced displacement. In addition to the high risks of injury, permanent disability or death to which this unique category of children is exposed, child soldiers are often the victims of psychological scars if they survive armed conflicts. My delegation welcomes the existing cooperation between the office of the Special Representative and the specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and hopes that this cooperation will be strengthened for the sake of the children.

Finally, my delegation calls upon all parties concerned to strictly comply with their obligations under international law, in particular their obligations under the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Additional Protocols of 1977 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. We hope that the existing laws governing the participation of children in armed conflict will be reviewed with a view to providing essential protection to this vulnerable sector of our society.

The President: I thank the representative of Kenya for his kind words addressed to me.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My delegation should like to extend to you, Sir, and to the delegation of Portugal its sincere thanks for convening this open debate, which we hope will be repeated on other issues of interest to the Council, thus allowing all United Nations Members to participate and contribute, in implementation of the principle of transparency in the Council's work.

I should like at the outset to express my delegation's appreciation to all those who participated in preparing the presidential statement on children in armed conflict that we will adopt today. My delegation has joined the consensus on the draft, in its belief in this cause as just and important to the entire international community and out of its conviction of the need for all parties to conflicts to abide by all their obligations, in accordance with the principles of international law — particularly the Geneva Conventions of 1949, their Additional Protocols of 1977, and the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child — and the commitments incumbent upon all States to punish the perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian laws applicable in this regard.

My delegation strongly condemns the targeting of children in armed conflicts, and their humiliation and subjection to atrocities, exploitation, abduction and displacement, not to mention their recruitment by force for military activities. We expect children to be treated kindly and with care because they are young and vulnerable, physically and psychologically. However, we see that some take advantage of them because of their vulnerability — a fact that makes the abuse of children one of the most inhumane and atrocious practices ever perpetrated.

It would be beneficial for the international community to study in depth the social dislocations that result in the exposure of children to this form of exploitation. Conflicts, and their major causes, cannot be isolated from other social factors, particularly when such factors are directly linked to such conflicts. The

continuing efforts of the United Nations programmes, funds and agencies that are concerned with providing protection to children who are victims of armed conflicts provide an ideal means of mitigating the effects of these conflicts on innocent children, who, in fact, constitute the majority of victims.

The phenomenon of using children in armed conflicts has become so acute that it has gone beyond all of the moral value systems acknowledged by the international community. In the light of the statement made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I pose this question: how can the contemporary international community allow a situation to develop in which children are so badly treated, given that previous civilizations had values and rules governing the conduct of war that shielded children and women from the kind of harm we witness today?

Bahrain, which is keen to provide the necessary protection for children against the destructive effects of armed conflicts, would like to express its appreciation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Olara Otunnu, and to state here and now that the recommendations that he made today are worthy of examination and analysis.

The President: I thank the representative of Bahrain for the kind words he addressed to me and to my delegation.

Mr. Essonghé (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, my delegation would like to welcome your initiative, Mr. President, in organizing this debate on the important subject of the situation of children in armed conflict. In this respect, I have no doubt that this discussion will result in concrete actions, given the resolve to eradicate this evil, which has been described today by Mr. Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. I am grateful to him for his comments.

It will be recalled that the international community has already established a number of legal texts aimed at the promotion, protection and well-being of children. These include the 1949 Geneva Convention, the Additional Protocols of 1977 and the 1989 United Nations Convention, all of which relate to the rights of the child. This matter is therefore one of undoubted importance, given the role that children are called upon to play in societies. I am sure that the Council would agree with me, Sir, that children represent the human capital of the future, since they are destined to take over from adults.

As a result, they must be assured of conditions conducive to their personal development, the development of their inherent intellectual capacities and balanced physical growth. It has been clearly demonstrated that an imbalance in their environment, especially when that environment is disrupted by scenes of violence and horror, results in the alienation of personality. Such alienation leads in turn to disturbances at all levels of society.

That is why we are convinced of the need to strengthen international legislation to protect children, ensure that they are safe and respected and prevent them from suffering traumas that are often protracted and from which recovery is often difficult.

Furthermore, we also believe that the situation of children in armed conflict cannot be separated from the resolution of the global issues involved in such conflicts. In other words, if we are to tackle the problem of the use of children in combat and the brutalities of all kinds that they suffer, including the scenes of horror that they witness during conflict, we must do our utmost to prevent armed conflicts.

For all these reasons, we support the recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General aimed at preventing the use of child soldiers. We also firmly support the measures aimed at demobilization, as well as other relevant recommendations. Finally, we support the draft presidential statement on this subject.

The President: I thank the representative of Gabon for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Italy. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Allow me first of all to express the grief of my Government, and my own personal sorrow, at the tragic death last Friday of a dear friend, Maître Alioune Blondin Beye, former Foreign Minister of Mali and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Angola, and at the deaths of five of his colleagues and two members of the aeroplane crew. Maître Blondin Beye and the United Nations officers accompanying him gave their lives, under the flag of the United Nations, for the cause of peace and a better future for all the people of Africa. They deserve our highest tribute and immense gratitude.

Italy fully endorses the statement delivered by Sir John Weston on behalf of the European Union. I would like, however, to add some considerations not only as the Permanent Representative of Italy, but also as one of the 10 elected, independent members of a Committee which sits in Geneva three times a year to monitor the implementation of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Today, thanks especially to your own efforts and sensitivity, Mr. President, the Security Council has a unique opportunity to discuss how the world can protect children affected by armed conflict and ensure compliance with the too-often-challenged obligations enshrined in article 38 of that Convention, which is — allow me to remind the Council — even more universal than the Charter of the United Nations, having been signed by 193 countries and ratified by 191.

It was here in the Security Council, in January 1996, that I heard for the first time a detailed account of the tragic phenomenon of child soldiers. It was when the current Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, then Permanent Representative of the United States, delivered a very strong and passionate statement upon her return from Liberia. Mrs. Albright described the plight of Liberian children in the following terms:

> "The era of the child soldier in Liberia must come to an end immediately. It is an outrage by any standard of civilization that children under the age of 15, numbering between 4,000 and 6,000, are toting automatic weapons, slaughtering innocent civilians and ignoring the rule of law. They have no identity other than through the weapon they carry." *[S/PV.3621, p.5]*

These words could not be more timely today.

I would be remiss if I did not equally acknowledge the very impressive and magnificent role played by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, in raising public awareness of the tragedy of the children soldiers. Ambassador Otunnu is carrying on in the distinguished tradition of Mrs. Graça Machel, who brought the gravity of the phenomenon in all its dimensions to the attention of the world in her well-known 1996 study on the impact of armed conflict on children, which was presented that same year to the General Assembly. It remains the most thorough and up-to-date study of the phenomenon. I should like once again to take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Machel and to strongly support the role of Ambassador Olara Otunnu as United Nations Special Representative in defence of children affected by war.

For centuries, maybe millennia, during war and other armed conflicts children have been exposed to all forms of violence. In the past these used to be considered the unfortunate but inevitable side-effects of war. However, they have now taken on new and even more horrifying characteristics: more and more children have become involved directly in wars as combatants, deliberately recruited for this purpose by Governments, armed groups or warlords. Some are impressed into the army; others are kidnapped from their families; still others are forced to enlist in order to defend their families. Many children are picked up off the street, or from schools or orphanages. Sometimes a combination of poverty and fear leads families to offer their children to warring groups: their "paycheck" often goes straight to the family. At other times children become soldiers simply to survive; with no centre to their lives, they come to see the various armed factions as a sort of family.

In their forced exodus from conflict areas, huge waves of refugees and displaced persons have a deep physical and emotional impact on children, who are the more vulnerable in such events — the first to suffer and the first to die. They often have to walk for days at a time without food or water, while refugee camps are all too often characterized by high levels of violence, abuse and untold humiliation and suffering.

Furthermore, in the wake of wars children are exposed to the dangers of landmines and thousands of unexploded devices, sometimes disguised to look like toys — like butterflies or pineapples.

As was mentioned earlier, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in the last 10 years alone 2 million children have been killed in wars, 6 million maimed, 12 million left homeless. Is this not a modern-day "massacre of the innocents"?

The problem of children in war is dealt with extensively in article 38 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989. Under that article, States parties are required to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts; take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 15 years do not take a direct part in hostilities;

refrain from recruiting under-15-year-olds into their armed forces; give priority to the oldest in recruiting any 15-to-18-year-olds; and take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.

Building on these provisions, the Geneva-based Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasized in its jurisprudence that the effects of armed conflict on children should be considered in the framework of all the articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, it has stressed that it believes, in the light of the definition of the child and the principle of the best interests of the child, that no child under the age of 18 should ever be allowed to be involved in hostilities, either directly or indirectly.

I believe that it is high time that everyone fully complies with these very precise and binding provisions.

We very much welcome the adoption of a presidential statement by the Security Council on children affected by armed conflict. It will certainly send a strong and unequivocal message to Governments, to armed bands and warlords, and to world public opinion on the relevance of the problem and the need to find an urgent solution.

Most of all — and here I agree entirely with Special Representative Olara Otunnu — what we need most of all is to move from words to action. We dare to propose the following measures, whose immediate implementation would greatly contribute, we believe, to the defence of children.

First, we should raise to an even greater extent the awareness of public opinion and let the world know where, how and by whom these horrible crimes of exploitation of innocent children are committed. Every case in which a warlord presses children into conflict must be denounced and exposed. We need in particular to mobilize the media: believe me, a special report on the little screen in our houses can often do more good than dozens of conferences or workshops on the issue.

Secondly, we must urge the immediate demobilization of all active soldiers younger than 18; the adoption of measures to achieve this goal would send an important signal to the international community. In this context, we strongly hope that the final statute of the international criminal court, which is currently being negotiated in Rome, will include a provision bringing within the jurisdiction of that court the crime of using children in hostilities.

Thirdly, in peace agreements and in peace-building, we need to give high priority to the problems of children and to the need to integrate them into civil society. Substantial — not nominal — financial and human resources should be earmarked by the donor community for humanitarian aid and assistance to children who are victims of war for their demobilization and rehabilitation after the conflict.

Fourthly, since 1994, as has been recalled today, a working group at the United Nations has been studying a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child that would set 18 as the minimum age for involvement in hostilities. This draft protocol should at long last be finalized, opened for signature and ratified as soon as possible.

Finally, for the effective protection of children from the risk of mines, we need a complete ban on anti-personnel landmines, strengthened financial assistance for demining operations, mine-awareness programmes that teach children to avoid mines, and rehabilitation and assistance programmes for children injured and maimed by mines.

The scourge of children in wars must be eradicated, and eradicated immediately. Italy strongly urges the cooperation of all States, international and national organizations, relevant United Nations bodies and civil society in stepping up their efforts to that end.

After all, we must never forget that children are the future of humanity: our own future.

The President: There are still a number of speakers remaining on my list for this meeting. In view of the lateness of the hour, I intend, with the concurrence of the members of the Council, to suspend the meeting until 3.15 this afternoon.

The meeting was suspended at 1.25 p.m. and resumed at 3.25 p.m.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Norway. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Children are the least responsible yet the most vulnerable victims in all conflicts. They are widely used as instruments of war — *inter alia*, as child soldiers — and they are deliberately targeted. This is intolerable and unacceptable. Norway

strongly supports the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict in his important role as an advocate of political and humanitarian initiatives to benefit children at the international level, as well as in contacts with the parties to a conflict. We feel that the work of the Special Representative should be followed up by all relevant bodies of the United Nations system, as well as by other organizations.

In his interim report to the Commission on Human Rights, the Special Representative stated,

> "the most important and pressing challenge today is how to translate [international] standards and [local norms] into action that can make a tangible difference to the fate of children exposed to danger on the ground." *[E/CN.4/1998/119, Summary]*

Norway therefore welcomes the fact that the Security Council has included this issue on its agenda, and we appreciate the opportunity to participate in this open debate.

As the body with primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, the Security Council must take the interests of children explicitly into account in its considerations. The Council should be kept regularly informed of the activities of the Special Representative. The Security Council can address the needs of children in different ways when establishing the mandates of peacekeeping and peace-building operations and in the context of mediation of peace agreements.

In conflict areas, access to humanitarian supplies is vital. The Security Council must take this into account in its consideration of conflict situations, and it must also be willing to consider facilitating the disbursement of necessary humanitarian relief where the needs of children have to be given special consideration.

In modern wars, most casualties are caused by small arms, far too often in the hands of children. Small arms must be controlled. The Security Council should consider whether the collection and destruction of small arms should be part of the mandate of future peacekeeping operations, as is the case in the ongoing operation in the Central African Republic.

Demobilization and reintegration of soldiers must be part of an integrated humanitarian relief and peace-building strategy. Psycho-social rehabilitation and the reintegration of children who have experienced the atrocities of war even before they can read and write pose specific challenges to which the international community should devote more attention. We fully support the efforts of the Special Representative to engage the United Nations agencies and international humanitarian non-governmental organizations to this end.

We must face the fact that women and children are victims of rape, sexual abuse and gender-based violence, which in many places have become an intrinsic part of armed-conflict strategies. These activities are being used systematically by certain armed forces to humiliate and demoralize their declared enemies, as well as against the national population in internal conflicts. This practice cannot be tolerated. The international community should make it clear that this is unacceptable and that the military leadership should be held responsible for the conduct of their forces.

Norway has supported programmes for the rehabilitation of women who have been victims of sexual violence in, for example, the former Yugoslavia. But much remains to be done on this sensitive and painful issue, and as we speak, important work is being carried out in Rome, where the statutes for the new permanent international criminal court are being negotiated, based, *inter alia*, on input from the Special Representative.

When the United Nations, on behalf of the world community, sends humanitarian personnel, peacekeeping forces or other representatives to conflict areas, they must live up to the highest standards of behaviour towards the local population. Regrettably, this has not always been the case. There should be compulsory training to sensitize all peacekeepers to problems of child prostitution and exploitation of children, as some countries have already established. We encourage the United Nations to continue to promote awareness of these sensitive issues in the training of its staff.

Landmines are a threat to all civilians, not least to children. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction has established an international framework for further comprehensive action. We are encouraged by the broad global support extended to the Convention, and in particular the many mine-affected countries that have signed it. We see mine action as part of the wider agenda for peace and sustainable development.

Participation of children in armed conflict is a tragic and growing problem. States are in the process of negotiating an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on involvement of children in armed conflict. Norway is among the States that support raising the age limit of participation in hostilities to 18 years. Children under this age should in all circumstances be protected from taking part in warfare.

The challenge before the international community is no less than that of creating a culture for protecting children. We look forward to a continued focus and follow-up by the Security Council on this important issue.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Germany. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Henze (Germany): Let me, at the outset, express our full support for the statement made by my British colleague on behalf of the European Union.

My country attributes the greatest importance to the promotion and protection of all human rights. But it is particularly intolerable and unacceptable for all of us that children, who are one of the most vulnerable groups in our societies, have, during recent decades, increasingly become victims and targets in armed conflicts and have even been misused as soldiers. Their rights especially deserve our full attention and political commitment.

While condemning all kinds of human rights violations, violence deliberately inflicted on children in modern warfare is particularly appalling. We have committed ourselves to participate most actively in activities and initiatives undertaken at all levels and in all fields that are suitable for protecting children from being victimized in the theatres of
conflict around the world and for rehabilitating those children who have already suffered physically, mentally and emotionally from the cruelties of war.

My country therefore warmly welcomes the initiative taken by the Security Council to bring the subject of children in armed conflict to its agenda. Our debate will undoubtedly raise awareness among all States and the public about this important subject, and the position taken by the Council should give a clear indication to all perpetrators that the United Nations and its Member States will not passively stand by and watch while children are intentionally targeted, brutalized and used as instruments by belligerents.

Germany commends the Secretary-General for having appointed a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and especially for the choice of the personality to discharge this mandate. During his first year in office, Mr. Olara Otunnu already has proved to be a true advocate of all children victimized by the scourge of war. To a great extent the rise in public awareness of the situation of children in conflict zones seems due to his commitment and political outreach. The results of his visits to countries affected by violent disputes clearly show that his interventions in favour of suffering children can make a difference. I wish to thank Mr. Otunnu on behalf of my country for his commitment and to express Germany's continuing support, morally as well as financially, for his mandate.

In view of children's vulnerability in situations of armed conflict or natural disaster, they are one of the prime target groups of my Government's humanitarian relief abroad. Thus, in 1997 under our refugee aid programmes, we provided special emergency relief for children in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Another focus of our project support is the demobilization of ex-combatants, especially juveniles and children. In the last several years, Germany has funded income- and employment-generating activities for ex-combatants in Angola, Ethiopia, Uganda and Cambodia with more than DM 24 million. A further DM 9 have been earmarked in 1997 for the same purpose.

In the current negotiations on an optional protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child relating to children in armed conflict, my country advocates the stipulation of 18 years as the minimum age for direct participation in armed conflict. When depositing its instruments ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the German Government declared that it would not avail itself of the opportunity provided by the Convention to set the age limit at 15 years, as allowed by paragraph 2 of article 38 of the Convention.

In the opinion of my Government, it would be desirable to enforce a minimum age of 18 years for indirect participation in armed conflict as well. In further negotiations, Germany will advocate, in close coordination with its partners in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the highest possible standard of protection for children and juveniles involved in armed hostilities. We urge States Parties to the Convention to contribute to ensuring the successful adoption of the optional protocol and, even

prior to its adoption, to apply paragraph 2 of article 38 in such a way that the age limit is increased to 18 years.

Every year, some 20,000 civilians, including thousands of children, fall victim to the indiscriminate use of landmines, and anti-personnel mines in particular. Germany has therefore long demanded a worldwide ban on anti-personnel mines and urged a speedy conclusion of a binding international convention to that effect.

The Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction of December 1997 is an important international achievement. In the interest of tens of thousands of victims, among them thousands of children, my Government appeals to all those States which have so far opposed a total ban on anti-personnel mines to give up their resistance, sign the Ottawa ban treaty, and support its early entry into force.

Impunity is one of the main causes of the abuse of children in armed conflict. We are convinced that misusing children for active participation in armed hostilities constitutes a crime. At the Diplomatic Conference for the early establishment of a permanent international criminal court, which is currently being held in Rome, Germany therefore strongly supports the inclusion of that most serious offence in the statute of the international criminal court.

In summary, Germany wants to be second to none in combating violence against children in armed conflict, a particularly detestable form of abomination.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Canada. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Fowler (Canada) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, I wish to join Ambassador Fulci in conveying our deepest regret at the tragic death of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Maître Alioune Blondin Beye; members of the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola who were accompanying him; and the two pilots of the plane in which they were flying. Maître Beye, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali, performed his sensitive work with unflagging intelligence and zeal. His loss, and those of his colleagues in the cause of peace, will be lamented throughout the great United Nations family.

I will begin this afternoon by congratulating you, Sir, for your initiative in arranging this debate. Focusing the Security Council's attention on the plight of children caught up in armed conflict is both appropriate and overdue.

It is appropriate because the Security Council, in many of the ways it carries out its peace and security mandate — be it mediation of peace settlements or peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations — has an unparalleled impact on the plight of children affected by armed conflict. This is an urgent problem not only of human rights and development, but also of peace and basic human security.

Furthermore, the ramifications of our continuing to neglect this issue today will have devastating consequences on future generations. Children weaned on violence will be ill-equipped to build a peaceful and prosperous society for the future, which in turn will increase the threats to international peace and stability in the coming decades.

It is also appropriate that, in considering possible measures in this area, the Council seek the views and support of all Member States, as well as of relevant international agencies and non-governmental organizations. I commend you in particular, Sir, for considering the contributions of non-members of the Security Council before the Council takes its decision. Your efforts to this end represent a high standard that we hope will be followed in the Council's future proceedings.

(*spoke in English*)

This debate is also overdue because today's conflicts exact a grim and terrible toll on children, a toll of death and injury, with some 2 million children killed and 4 to 5 million disabled in conflicts over the past decade; a toll of displacement and separation from families, with over a million children orphaned over the same period; a toll of abduction, detention, sexual abuse — including rape — and the widespread recruitment of child soldiers, with hundreds of thousands of children currently participating, in one manner or in another, in armed conflicts around the world; and a toll of lasting psychological trauma, with some 10 million children being deeply scarred in this way over the past decade.

A fundamental point of departure for this discussion can be found in relevant international human rights and

humanitarian law, in instruments like the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols.The basic legal norms do exist to protect children from the ravages of armed conflict, but this is clearly not enough. If such standards are to have any effect, state and non-state actors must be aware of, understand, accept and fully adhere to them.

The dissemination of information relating to these legal norms and the enforcement of these principles require rigorous political advocacy. In this connection, Canada strongly supports the work of Olara Otunnu as Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, a post created as a result of the ground-breaking report by Mrs. Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children.

As an advocate on behalf of children trapped in conflict, and as a mediator with Governments and non-state actors that target children, the Special Representative has a critical role to play in creating "political space" for the relevant United Nations agencies and the humanitarian non-governmental organizations which are increasingly active in this area.

When designing its operations, the Security Council must make every effort to protect both children and their supportive environment: schools, hospitals, health centres and religious institutions. We strongly endorse the concept of children and their protective and nurturing institutions being considered as "zones of peace" and protected as such.

Perhaps the most well-known aspect of this issue, and one which needs our urgent attention, is that of the use of child soldiers — not just those who are trained to fight, but also the many children who are required to serve in armies and rebel groups as cooks, porters, messengers, spies, labourers and sex slaves. While this is not a new phenomenon, in the late twentieth century the problem has escalated with the advent of light-weapons technology, the rise of intra-State conflict and the huge increase in irregular forces in most of today's armed confrontations.

Canada is therefore pleased to be supporting the non-governmental organization Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, which tomorrow in New York and in Geneva will launch its campaign to raise global awareness of this problem. We urge this campaign to pay special attention to the plight of young girls caught up in armed conflict and to the acts of violence against women and girls which such conflicts seem to generate so inexorably. Targeted as sex slaves, they not only suffer directly and immediately in times of war, but are further violated with social stigmas which impair their reintegration into their families and societies after the hostilities are concluded.

Only last week, a group of about 30 young girls was abducted from their school in northern Uganda by the so-called Lord's Resistance Army, which has already abducted hundreds of children to serve its needs since the beginning of the year.

In addressing the issue of child soldiers, the challenge is manifold. There is the challenge of prevention: we must make it difficult and risky to make combatants out of children. There must be retribution for those who indulge in such practices, and we must find alternatives to children being recruited as soldiers. This involves addressing forthrightly the fundamental root causes, including underdevelopment, economic deprivation and societal instability, that make children prone and vulnerable to being made soldiers.

International legal norms have an important role in such prevention. Canada supports the early adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which aims at raising the age of recruitment in the armed forces, and especially the age at which young people may participate in hostilities.

In addition, Canada has taken a strong position in favour of the creation of an impartial, independent and effective international criminal court, and we are working to ensure that its statute will contain a provision to criminalize the recruitment and use of children under 15 years old as soldiers.

We must also facilitate the early demobilization of children from current military pursuits. In this connection, when mediating peace agreements, and in developing peacekeeping and peace-building mandates, the Security Council should insist on compliance, by Government and non-State actors alike, with the relevant principles of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Finally, we must all assist with the reintegration and rehabilitation of child soldiers into their communities and enable them to participate fully in the reconstruction of their war-torn societies. To this end, Canada has recently launched a number of projects supporting the tracing and resettling of children in northern Uganda and the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers in Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Our approach to the plight of children affected by armed conflict should be founded on the premise that they represent the most vulnerable segment of human society, and as such they deserve special care and protection of their rights. It does not satisfy our duty merely to meet their basic needs, as objects of compassion. The Security Council's engagement in this issue therefore represents a significant step forward in advancing the cause of human security and a more comprehensive approach to solving this problem.

As a first step, the adoption of a strong presidential statement by the Security Council against such vile practices will focus attention on this issue. The Council cannot stop there. It must persist in its vigilance and continue to keep the plight of children caught up in armed conflict at the forefront of its agenda. This means, *inter alia*, automatically considering taking measures to protect children as part of its actions to maintain international peace and security, including, of course, actions which address specifically the rights and requirements of children devastated by the ravages of war.

The President: I thank the representative of Canada for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Indonesia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): It is an honour for me to address the Security Council once again on an issue of great significance to international peace and security as well as of great moral responsibility. I should like to begin by expressing my profound appreciation and respect for the work undertaken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, who has travelled extensively, meeting with representatives of many countries, to discuss the situation of children in armed conflict and underscoring the need to respect the rights of children and to take resolute action to ensure that those rights are fully respected. Indeed, the international community should undertake to pursue such respect with all determination and perseverance, both in words and through action.

The nature of armed conflict has clearly changed over the past years, as civilian populations have become targets. Now approximately 90 per cent of casualties of war are civilians, mainly women and children. The number of civilian casualties in any given conflict is astounding, and this compels a response from the international community. One of the most alarming trends relating to children in armed conflicts is their participation as active soldiers. Children as young as eight years of age are being forcibly recruited, coerced and induced to become combatants. Manipulated by adults, children have been drawn into violence that they are too young to resist, with consequences they cannot imagine.

Child soldiers are recruited in many different ways. Some are conscripted, others are press-ganged or kidnapped and still others are forced to join armed groups to defend their families. Sometimes children become soldiers simply in order to survive. Indeed, a military unit can be something of a refuge, serving as a kind of surrogate family. Children may join if they believe that that is the only way to guarantee regular meals, clothing or medical attention.

In this regard, Indonesia believes that the international community must commit itself to undertaking the necessary effective measures for the prevention of armed conflict. This essentially calls for a serious and sustained commitment to address the socio-economic factors which in the first instance prompt armed conflict and exacerbate ethnic and other social divisions.

In those instances where the international community has proved unsuccessful in preventing violence and armed conflict from erupting, all nations should commit themselves to strengthening international efforts to ensure that the rights of children, as guaranteed under various international commitments and humanitarian law, are fully respected. We should be clear in understanding that the protection of children is the responsibility of each Government. At the same time, we must recognize that it is also a legitimate concern of the international community.

We see fit, therefore, to incorporate the aspect of children in armed conflict in peacekeeping, peace-building and humanitarian undertakings. In this context, the situation of children should be better addressed in the establishment and implementation of peace agreements and in relief and protection measures. All peace agreements should include specific measures to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers into society. There is an urgent need for the international community to support programmes, including advocacy and social services, for the demobilization and community reintegration of child soldiers. However, Indonesia would caution that we must avoid politicization for extraneous

motives in international endeavours to protect children, which would jeopardize effective action on their behalf.

At the national level, the conscription of children as actors in war should be condemned, and the immediate demobilization of children ensured. To that end, Governments should enact legislation to prohibit the recruitment of minors in armed conflict and together launch a global campaign that would bring an end to such practices and rehabilitate and reintegrate children into society.

Though near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been achieved, we nevertheless should continue to call on all States to become parties and for all States parties to implement the Convention fully, to cooperate closely with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to comply in a timely manner with their reporting obligations under the Convention. I would underline that when implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, special attention should be given to policies for health, nutrition, education, the improvement of family income and the creation of employment. Thus, we can simultaneously address the root causes which hamper the genuine enjoyment of rights, namely poverty, economic constraints and underdevelopment.

I would recall that the Commission on Human Rights, *inter alia*, urged all Governments to promote gender- and age-appropriate mine-awareness programmes and child-centred rehabilitation, which would reduce the numbers and mitigate the plight of child victims. Today, children in at least 68 countries live amid the threat of more than 110 million landmines still lodged in the ground, awaiting an unwary step. Added to this are millions of pieces of unexploded ordnance — bombs, shells and grenades that failed to detonate. Like landmines, these types of ordnance are indiscriminate weapons that are triggered by innocent and unsuspecting passers-by. I would therefore like to encourage the United Nations Mine Action service to continue to take into account the specific situation of children and child victims. In this connection, Governments should immediately enact comprehensive national legislation to ban the production, use, trade and stockpiling of landmines and support the campaign for a worldwide ban.

Indonesia believes that States should contribute constructively in the negotiations on an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a view to strengthening that Convention. As the landmark report prepared by Ms. Graça Machel so pointedly illustrated, for too long the consequences for children have been tolerated as an unfortunate side-effect of war, whereas the reality has become that children are increasingly targets and not incidental victims. The specific recommendations made in that report on sexual exploitation and gender-based violence should be realized. For its part, the Security Council has a specific responsibility to address issues pertaining to the protection of civilian populations, and in particular children in armed conflict. Likewise, refugee and displaced persons camps, sought as havens from conflict and strife, should be made secure and designed to improve the security of women and girls in particular.

The Security Council is in a good position to address this fundamental challenge to the response of the Organization to situations of armed conflict by endorsing the recommendations made in the report issued by Graça Machel; by extending its full support to the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict; and by committing itself to incorporating the concerns of children in all future resolutions on situations of armed conflict.

In so doing, the Security Council would lend force and meaningful action to the moral voice of the United Nations, while at the same time moving in furtherance of its noble goals, namely the maintenance of international peace and security.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Morocco. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Snoussi (Morocco) (*interpretation from French*): Allow me at the outset, on my own behalf and on behalf of the African Group, which I have the honour of chairing this month, to extend my sincere condolences to the United Nations, the Government of Mali and the family of the late Alioune Blondin Beye, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Angola and former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali. The tragic death of Mr. Blondin Beye and his colleagues is indeed a great loss to the United Nations and to the African continent.

As the representative of the Kingdom of Morocco, I should like sincerely to congratulate you, Sir, on your presidency of the Council for this month, and to recall the excellent, even exemplary, relations between Portugal and Morocco. I believe that your sense of a job well

done, your ability to listen and to discern what is important and your vast experience all have enabled the Council to do its work extremely well throughout this month.

I should like also to extend my congratulations to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Njuguna Mahugu, for having conducted the work of this body so very ably.

My delegation would like to extend its sincere thanks to Mr. Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in his capacity as defender of and spokesman for children affected by conflict, for the work he has done in making the international community more aware of the cruelty and the chaos that characterize today's conflicts and in mobilizing Council members to take action with respect to the tragic fate of children who are victims of conflict, particularly those in Sierra Leone.

Morocco was truly devastated to hear the terrible accounts of the maiming of children in Sierra Leone and joins in the urgent appeal by Mr. Otunnu for the international community to help the children threatened by the horrible conflict in that fraternal country.

The United Nations has since its creation always tried to focus attention on the suffering of children in armed conflict. Statistics compiled by the United Nations Children's Fund show clearly that before 1945, most victims of war were soldiers. However, in the 150 armed conflicts that have erupted throughout the world since that time, 80 per cent of the 20 million people who died and 80 per cent of the 60 million who were maimed or traumatized have been civilians, the overwhelming majority of whom have been women and children.

Today the suffering of those children reminds us that it is our duty under all circumstances to ensure respect for all of our commitments, including the principle of "Children First", which was proclaimed at the 1990 World Summit for Children in connection with the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. That Convention, now near universal, gives priority to the survival of children and to their protection in time of war and peace.

Unfortunately, several generations of children are still being sacrificed and maimed, physically and emotionally, during conflicts between adults, in defiance of the legal instruments adopted by the international community.

My delegation therefore urges compliance with commitments that have been made, so that the suffering of the children can end as soon as possible.

The report of Ms. Graça Machel, welcomed by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/77, was an impartial and moving document that described the scope of the tragedy experienced by children who are helpless in the face of armed conflict. The recommendations in that report, contained in documents A/51/306 and A/51/306/Add.1, remain timely and must be implemented promptly.

As the Secretary-General stressed in his note of 26 August 1996 [A/51/306], we must find new and innovative solutions to protect children in conflict situations and prevent those conflicts from occurring. States are committed to guaranteeing a broad range of rights for children and to ensure that children will enjoy their rights to health, to education and to grow up among their families and communities. The report of the expert of the Secretary-General showed how the legitimate rights of children are systematically violated during times of armed conflict. Exposing such violations will without doubt help to eliminate them, or at least to attenuate them.

The international community must take action. It is unthinkable that we should stand by as the rights of children are so obviously and systematically violated. Local and national strategies must bolster the action of the international community and vice versa. Childhood is sacred, and all children must be protected from the twisted, inhuman effects of armed conflict.

Children are the future of mankind. Let us follow our instincts and protect those who are unable to protect themselves. By protecting children in armed conflicts we gain fresh opportunities to tackle the problems that cause their suffering. Children have the right to life, to peace and to respect. Let us work together to help them.

The moving cases related earlier by the representative of Canada highlighted the terrible slowness with which the international community is shouldering its responsibilities. All these children, these girls, these women, who have been mutilated and tortured, and who are the victims of armed conflict are waiting for us to rise to the occasion and take action. What are we waiting for?

The President: I thank the representative of Morocco for the kind words he addressed to me and to my country.

The next speaker is the representative of Slovakia. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Ms. Keltošová (Slovakia): Allow me to express, on behalf of the delegation of Slovakia, my appreciation for the convening of this meeting on such a timely and urgent subject. I sincerely welcome the initiative to organize an open debate on children in armed conflict, something that is taking place in the Security Council for the first time. Slovakia fully supports and has aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union. Let me now briefly touch upon several aspects of the issue before us which are of particular importance to my country.

It is our moral duty to make every effort to prevent all forms of abuse of children and to seek effective measures for the protection of children. Children are the fragile wealth of mankind, as well as of every nation and every human being. Their well-being is not the internal matter of any single country. The abuse of children in armed conflicts, and particularly their recruitment and use in hostilities, not only prove the low moral and ethical profile of the persons responsible for these activities but also constitute a serious breach of international law. Despite the efforts made by the international community through the adoption in November 1989 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, negative phenomena persist in a number of countries. Many post-cold-war conflicts have taken the form of internal factional violence, civil strife and ethnic clashes that have significant external repercussions and disastrous humanitarian implications. They are using more sophisticated and brutal weapons and fighting methods, and affecting growing number of civilians, particularly children, who are the most vulnerable target in a conflict-torn society and who are unable to protect themselves.

Clearly, there is a need to update existing legal instruments in order to reflect the altered nature of a threat and to strengthen human rights standards in this respect. Therefore, Slovakia supports and welcomes the results achieved so far by the working group of the Commission on Human Rights on a draft optional protocol to the Convention,on the Rights of the Child, regarding the involvement of children in armed conflict. This effort should bring about more specific guidelines for the implementation of articles 38 and 39 of the Convention. We hope that the draft optional protocol will be completed expeditiously and will create a sufficient legal framework to prevent the abuse of children in armed conflict.

A legal instrument, no matter how brilliant, is only a piece of paper without an efficient monitoring and enforcement mechanism. Governments should not only be encouraged to ratify relevant international treaties and incorporate them into national law; they should also ensure full implementations of commitments they have undertaken and bring to justice persons responsible for illegally recruiting children. Moreover, efforts to protect the rights of the child should not ignore the position of children in a conflict-torn society in a broader social and economic context. In programmes for children, particular attention should be paid to those separated from or without families, to other marginalized groups, to economically and socially deprived children and to the demobilization of child soldiers and their reintegration into society. Protection of the family environment, ensuring access to health care, food and education, the need to preserve a child's cultural environment as well as the need to ensure humanitarian access to children in situations of armed conflict also deserve our attention. I cannot but underline the role of the relevant programmes, funds and agencies of the United Nations system — which should be further strengthened — in coordination with the activities of non-governmental and humanitarian organizations involved in this area.

Slovakia recognizes the importance of the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The recommendations of the Special Representative, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, by whose presence we are honoured today, deserve our full attention. As a growing number of armed conflicts with the direct participation of children have occurred in recent years, we have to solve this painful and shameful issue together.

Slovakia is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and fully lives up to commitments stemming from the Convention. We devote special attention to all necessary measures to protect children against any physical and mental violence, offence or misuse. In Slovakia, legal, financial and institutional conditions have been created for this purpose, whether on the State level or through State support to non-governmental organizations, civic associations and foundations involved in activities aimed at the protection of children and youth, along with the local authorities and police and military forces. A good basis has been established for the effective protection of children and young people against any kind of abuse, and we intend to develop it further. Slovakia is ready to cooperate on the international level in this area, and to contribute to achieving the common

goals of the international community in the name of humanity and progress.

The President: I thank the representative of Slovakia for her kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Mozambique. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Santos (Mozambique): We share the message of condolence just conveyed by the Chairman of the African Group on the tragic death of Mr. Blondin Beye.

Allow me at the outset to join the speakers who preceded me in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and on the brilliant manner in which you have been conducting the affairs of the Council during the month of June. It gives us special pleasure to see Portugal preside over the deliberations of the Council on this important topic.

I would also like to pay special tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Mahugu of Kenya, for the exemplary manner in which he guided the work of the Council last month.

I wish to seize this opportunity to express once again our profound appreciation to the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for their relentless efforts and dedication and for bringing the issue of children in armed conflict to the centre of the international peace and security, human rights and development concerns of the entire world. Indeed, today's discussion in the Security Council represents one of the occasions of highest priority given to children in armed conflict on the individual and collective agendas of member States, regional organizations and the international community as a whole.

In 1996, Graça Machel, a distinguished daughter of Mozambique, after two years of a laborious investigation as the Expert of the Secretary-General on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, presented a comprehensive report on the plight of children when they are brutalized and abused in the context of armed conflicts.

While presenting a global assessment of the present reality and prevailing trends, the report searched for cures, as well as ways and means to prevent a recurrence of similar situations. In this regard, a wide range of recommendations for action in several areas were presented in the report, including, among others, landmines, child soldiers, refugees and displaced children, health and nutrition, psychological recovery and social integration, education, reconstruction and the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General. These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by all Member States of our Organization.

On the occasion of the presentation of the recommendations and the study, my delegation affirmed that the key to the success of this study lay in the follow-up actions and appropriate mechanisms to implement the agreed recommendations. Therefore, the appointment of Mr. Olara Otunnu to the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General constitutes a major step towards the common objective of putting an end to the violation of children's rights in armed conflicts. We strongly believe that Mr. Otunnu's demonstrated capabilities and the work he has done so far constitute fundamental factors for the attainment of our final and common goal.

As we speak today, in many armed conflicts throughout the world the security and well-being of children are being constantly endangered, regardless of the international instruments and local and traditional norms and values that provide for the rights, protection and welfare of children, even in situations of active violence.

In this regard, it is the collective responsibility of Governments, the international community and civil society to join efforts in order to maintain international peace and security worldwide through the promotion of prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts, the protection of children during armed conflict and the provision of the necessary assistance for rehabilitation in post-conflict situations.

This goal can be achieved only through the observance by all of relevant international and local norms and by coordinated assistance to mitigate the suffering of children during conflict and in post-conflict situations.

We also believe that the needs and rights of children must guide all actions aimed at resolving conflicts, including those by peacekeepers mandated by the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as they have a vital role to play in ensuring that children's rights are not violated by anyone.

A prolonged armed conflict in Mozambique produced more than 4 million refugees and internally displaced people, of whom more than half were children. Furthermore, over 2 million landmines were planted throughout the country, claiming even today more innocent lives, mostly those of children.

As we face the daunting task of national reconstruction today, dealing with the threat of landmines and small arms and the need to assist the rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people, it is my Government's belief that the present and future stability of the country lies to a great extent in the development, protection and education of tomorrow's men and women: today's children.

An immediate task before the Government and the entire Mozambican society in the post-conflict period has been to identify, rehabilitate and integrate instrumentalized and traumatized children who fell victim to the war. Considerable progress has been achieved in this regard.

The existence of landmines continues to be a major impediment to the smooth resettlement of population and the development of productive activities. Children are in greater danger because they are unaware of the threat posed by anti-personnel landmines. Therefore, awareness campaigns are as important for children as demining itself. An extensive demining programme is under way in Mozambique, with the valuable support of the international community. In a clear demonstration of its commitment, my country has already ratified the Ottawa Convention on landmines, adopted last December.

Mozambique remains committed to the promotion and protection of children's rights and to the implementation of the goals of the World Summit for Children, as well as to abiding by all relevant international legal instruments promoting and protecting children's rights.

In our subregion, southern Africa, efforts are being made to curb conflicts through the establishment of the Southern African Development Community organ on defence and security for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Regional efforts are equally being carried out to harmonize policies and coordinate actions relating to children. This represents our common pledge to put children at the centre of our national, regional and international agendas. We sincerely hope that the Council will do more in defence of the rights of children, particularly those affected by armed conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of Mozambique for his kind words addressed to me, to my country and to my predecessor.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Namibia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Andjaba (Namibia): We associate ourselves with the message of condolences extended by the Chairman of the African Group on the untimely death of Maître Alioune Blondin Beye.

In 1990, world leaders assembled at the United Nations and made a joint commitment to give every child a secure and happy childhood, including children in armed conflict. Article 38 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is explicit in this regard. Yet, almost a decade after the World Summit for Children, the reality is much different.

Today, too many children are carrying guns instead of books, playing amidst the debris of bombs instead of toys. Many children continue to bear the scars of landmines. Disturbing images of children in armed conflict narrating their painful experiences in total humiliation and trauma continue to beam into our homes. One need not listen to or read these stories in full. More often than not, the sad and fearful expressions of these children tell it all. It is a story of immense suffering; a story of starvation, malnutrition, abduction, rape, HIV/AIDS, children killing other children and children assuming parenthood to care for younger siblings who have been orphaned.

Armed conflict has adverse international repercussions and brings devastation and loss of life. But there are many who continue to profit from it and children are always the losers. They are the victims, and they are the easy targets. Indeed, causes of armed conflict vary from region to region, but we cannot meaningfully discuss this issue without taking into account the source of conflict, for taking such an uncharted course will be tantamount to perpetuating the very problem we seek to address.

International arms merchants and the protagonists who themselves ruthlessly fight for the control of natural resources are all part of the problem. This narrow economic interest leads to wide social strife. These are just some of the causes which the Council needs to recall

in mapping out effective ways and means to address the situation of children in armed conflict.

The appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was a timely development. But unless he is given all the necessary assistance to carry out his important mandate, his efforts will be futile. Furthermore, the scope of the situation of children in armed conflict should go beyond the cessation of hostilities. Traumatized children, and especially orphans, must be given special attention. In this regard, cooperation between the Special Representative and the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system are therefore essential. The multiplicity of humanitarian actors must not and cannot affect the effectiveness of humanitarian intervention. What is crucial is coordination of purpose.

The reintegration of child soldiers into society and their involvement in education and vocational training will not only pave the way for employment but, more importantly, will enable them to make informed decisions and choices in all aspects of life.

Whenever there is a suffering child, there is an agonized woman. It is therefore important that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict maintain contacts with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. That Committee has played an important role in bringing the situation of children in armed conflict to the fore, a situation which cannot be totally divorced from the situation of women in armed conflict. The special situation of the girl child in times of war must be given serious consideration.

For many of the ongoing conflicts, the deterioration of the situation and its impact on children have been exacerbated by inaction or delayed action. It is our view that with the improved early-warning capabilities of the United Nations, early follow-up action is imperative if we are to protect children. In this respect, compliance of all parties concerned with the Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 is essential. Of particular importance is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989.

Efforts must be increased in identifying sources of private arms flows into areas of actual or potential conflict. In addressing the humanitarian needs of children in armed conflict, we must not neglect political action. It is of utmost importance that the Council work with regional mechanisms for conflict resolution in order to reinforce action.

Humanitarian assistance cannot stop a conflict; it only address as the impact of the conflict on the victims. But the two are complementary, and one must not be used as an excuse for inaction at the expense of the other.

Let us all heed the call for children, first made in the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Burundi. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Ndaruzaniye (Burundi) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset, my delegation would like to associate itself with the statements made by the representative of the African Group and other speakers and to express our condolences to the families, to the United Nations and to the various Governments of those who tragically lost their lives along with Maître Alioune Blondin Beye.

It is a great honour for my delegation and for me personally to participate in this public debate of the Security Council on the issue of children and armed conflict. This is a subject of great importance for the future of humanity.

I would first of all like to take this opportunity to express my delegation's congratulations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and for your outstanding stewardship of its work in the month of June, as well as to the Security Council, which decided to hold this debate on children and armed conflict at such a high level of responsibility within the United Nations.

We welcome the work of Ms. Graça Machel and her report on the plight of children in armed conflict, and we fully support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu, who gave us a very clear and comprehensive introduction to this problem this morning.

Children are the humankind of tomorrow and the future of the world, which everyone wants to be better. But unfortunately, through the nefarious acts of human

beings our world is often plunged into wars, one more horrible than the next, thus eroding all hope, even hope of survival, for those to whom we would wish to bequeath a better world: the children.

However, we are duty-bound to educate children in the values of humanity and to create an environment conducive to a sound assimilation of these values in the hope that they will build a more peaceful and prosperous world of tomorrow. It is up to all of us. It is our responsibility, and future generations will judge us on our decisions to give them a brighter future.

In addressing my delegation's congratulations to the Security Council for having organized this discussion under your presidency, Sir, I was not merely complying with the customary courtesy; this subject is of capital importance for the future of all humankind.

My country, Burundi, is gradually emerging from a fratricidal war that has lasted for five years. My statement will serve as testimony to the new atrocities that children suffer in war, and I am sure that in other lands armed conflicts have not spared them.

Not only are national and international legal instruments insufficient to protect the children, but these instruments are tossed aside, replaced by the law of the jungle, and only those most blessed by nature survive.

My testimony will deal first of all with children in the Burundi genocide and the armed conflict that prolonged it, and children under the economic embargo imposed on my country by neighbouring countries for the last two years.

In October 1993 the Burundi crisis erupted through two simultaneous events: the assassination of the head of State and the organization of a genocide against a part of the population, which in only three weeks resulted in a death toll of over 100,000 people killed solely because of their ethnicity and/or political affiliation. Children, selected and arrested by their teachers, were condemned to be burned at the stake by the very people whose job it was to protect them. The best-known case is that of the high school in Kibimba where on 21 October 1993 nearly 100 pupils were burned alive by their school principal. But at the same time, in various locations, children were killed one after the other by a political school administration that was responsible for protecting them. This practice of ideological genocide has unfortunately extended to other countries in the Great Lakes region, and this has now become a very sad reality.

Not more than a month ago, in a neighbouring country, a school bus was the target of armed groups, and in another, more than 80 students were burned while sleeping inside their school. Children are no longer only victims of conflicts, but they are the target of the ideological genocide that is developing in the Great Lakes region.

The use of rape, sometimes by groups, as a means of humiliating women and girl children already condemned to die solely because of their ethnicity was observed in my country in several places during the three weeks of genocide. Dogs were unleashed to hunt down children hiding in the brush, and some men participated in a hunt for human beings like themselves, but upon whom they deliberately inflicted a beastly death. Other innocent children were eyewitnesses to these atrocities, and they continue to wander about without appropriate assistance, suffering from the after-effects of the psychological shock of seeing their friends being subjected to inhuman treatment for a crime they simply cannot understand — merely that of ethnic and/or political affiliation.

My Government maintains that these acts of genocide must face appropriate judgment at the national and the international level. That is why, in the light of the conclusions of a United Nations international inquiry duly mandated by the Security Council, my Government has requested the establishment of an international criminal tribunal for Burundi in order to prosecute the perpetrators of these crimes of genocide if national courts cannot reach them.

Unfortunately, some of these criminals travel freely throughout the world, sometimes under the protection of those who supported and encouraged the hate media that covered up their atrocities, assuring the perpetrators the impunity their crimes do not deserve.

At any rate, my Government maintains that the future international criminal court will have to recognize these crimes perpetrated against children. But it would be cynical if the current exercise pertaining to the international criminal court were to remain a forum for academic debate for years without the victims of genocide and other crimes against humanity receiving proper and equitable justice.

It is for this reason that while awaiting the effective establishment of an international criminal court, ad hoc tribunals will have to operate wherever evil shows its

face. The establishment of ad hoc tribunals in no way creates inconsistencies in the elaboration and the application of international criminal law; for we believe that international criminal law must adapt itself in order to deal with new complications of crimes of international scope, and we cannot encourage the impunity of crimes while awaiting a political and academic debate that could redress any possible inconsistency in the application of international criminal law.

The civil war has continued to exacerbate the plight of children in my country. War survivors have not been able to reunite with their families, and in the displacement camps it is not unusual for humanitarian agencies to find, for reasons of practical organization, regrouped families whose heads of household are no older than 12 years. Armed groups have destroyed primary schools to force children to follow them into combat. Hospitals and dispensaries have been destroyed, thus depriving the surviving children of primary health care.

A misfortune never comes alone. Under the guise of humanitarian assistance, benefiting from the absence of appropriate legislation and the misery of these children, some organizations have established international systems of adopting children in dire straits, depriving them of their national identity, sometimes without their consent. That is why my Government has just proposed to the National Assembly a new law on national and international adoption, which would give maximum protection for the rights of children and their parents. This law strengthens the commitment of my Government, which has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocols. Our desire is that the international community deal more with this serious problem of the adoption of children in situations of war.

In July 1996, there were political changes aimed at putting an end to the protracted fratricidal warfare. We are pleased to note today the progress achieved by the Burundi people in the search for peace over the past two years. A political platform and a constitutional act of transition resulting from a political partnership between the Government and the National Assembly have been set up. Institutions of transition under the new constitutional act are in place, and on 21 June in Arusha, Tanzania, all the parties to the conflict signed a joint declaration committing themselves to far-reaching political negotiations to resolve the Burundi conflict through dialogue, agreement and the rejection of violence.

During this same period, despite considerable progress in the search for peace, my country was subjected to a total economic embargo by neighbouring States. This has had a particularly dire effect on children, especially the youngest. Child war survivors now suffer a total lack of school materials, vaccines, clothing and food, as if destiny itself were dooming them to the genocide from which many had miraculously escaped.

We do not doubt the goodwill of neighbouring countries in their efforts to help Burundi restore peace, but the means adopted — economic sanctions — may betray their good intentions by decimating children, pregnant women, the elderly and other vulnerable populations. As a result of disruption in international trade law following the illegal imposition of economic sanctions against my country, the negative economic repercussions of organized smuggling have put a stranglehold on a landlocked country in need of relief from the war that has ravaged it for five years.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to thank the Security Council and you, Mr. President, for your statement of 25 June 1998 on the situation in Burundi. We hope that our neighbouring countries will frankly acknowledge the political progress achieved in my country towards peace and that they will not take it upon themselves to impede the Burundi peace process by maintaining an illegal embargo that is literally destroying children who are already victims of a war for which they are not at all responsible.

In conclusion, I wish to draw the attention of the international community to its role, and that of Governments, in condemning and suppressing all criminal acts against children.

Specific action must be initiated to help those children who still have a chance to live. This action must include various forms of assistance to war orphans; the rehabilitation of children traumatized by conflict experiences, such as the physically and mentally handicapped; and help for children to gain access to primary health care and elementary education. In this way they will be able to look forward to their rightful social reintegration and thus feel like full citizens of their nations.

That is why we believe that Governments and the international community should mobilize to create a special fund to assist and rehabilitate child victims and survivors of armed conflict.

In conclusion, my delegation fully supports the draft presidential statement of the Security Council on the situation of children in armed conflict.

The President: I thank the representative of Burundi for his kind words addressed to me and the Security Council.

The next speaker is the representative of Argentina. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Allow me to thank you, Sir, for the efforts you have made to ensure that today's item be taken up during your term of office and for your manifest commitment to participation and transparency in the work of this Council.

I should also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for having placed this item high on the Organization's political agenda, thus helping to make us more aware of this problem. Finally, I wish to thank Mr. Olara Otunnu, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who has been present here today, for his active and effective work.

The very fact that the Security Council — the principal organ of this Organization and the only one competent to create and impose obligations — is taking up this matter implies a commitment to the new issues affecting the international community and will help to deter those who violate the basic norms of conscience. This approach has already borne fruit in the debates on demining and on the protection of refugees, thus imparting credibility and positive visibility to the United Nations.

Mr. Otunnu has told us that, today, over 90 per cent of the victims of armed conflict are civilians, whereas, early in this century, the figure was below 10 per cent. This is because today, unlike in the past, the civilian population is being specifically targeted in attacks and war strategies.

This deplorable reality shows that children today are completely exposed to the impact of conflict. As was recently mentioned by Mrs. Clare Short, United Kingdom Secretary of State for International Development, in the past decade 2 million children have died in war and another 6 million have been seriously wounded.

We would highlight the work being done to remedy this situation by the United Nations Children's Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross and various non-governmental organizations.

Children should not be tolerated to participate in armed conflict, either as victims or as victimizers. The international instruments on this matter are quite clear in this respect. But since it is us, the adults, who allow the children to suffer the consequences of conflict, one appropriate institutional framework to end this phenomenon could be, for example, the future international criminal court. Many representatives believe in a role for the court and we trust that what has been said in this Council Chamber is being heard in Rome and that the appropriate provisions will be included in the statute, as the representatives of Canada, Italy, Sweden, the United Kingdom and various others have called for here.

We wish to stress the importance of improving the training of troops involved in peacekeeping missions so that they can help actively to improve the conditions in which children live in armed conflict. Those of us who contribute peacekeeping troops should strengthen our laws and instruct our personnel to protect children in peacekeeping operations.

Children remain threatened, however, in post-conflict situations, where sanctions deprive populations of essential resources. We must improve the design of sanctions, as has been mentioned here today, so that they have no impact on innocent civilians, particularly children. Until solutions are found, sanctions should be redirected so as to insulate children from their impact.

Lastly, I would note that the participation of children in armed conflict is an intolerable practice that ranks among the most atrocious forms of abuse of the weakest. It is therefore paramount to stress the importance of education and the strict implementation of international instruments in force today.

Before concluding, on behalf of the Government of Argentina I wish to pay a tribute to Maître Blondin Beye of Mali, who died, along with other personnel, in the service of the United Nations.

The President: I thank the representative of Argentina for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of the Czech Republic. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Šmejkal (Czech Republic): The Czech Republic welcomes this open Security Council debate on children in armed conflict, which, in our opinion, clearly shows that the protection of children affected by war is now very high on the agenda of the international community.

This is certainly most appropriate, in view of the gravity of the problems involved. We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu, for his thought-provoking statement. His ideas indeed deserve most careful consideration. The Czech Republic welcomed Ambassador Otunnu's appointment as Special Representative and we gladly renew our pledge of support for his admirable and efficient efforts in furthering the cause of protecting children affected by armed conflict. We note with satisfaction and appreciation that Ambassador Otunnu's voice has already proven to be a very audible and influential one and has contributed greatly to ensuring that the plight of children exposed to war is more vigorously addressed by the international community.

The Czech Republic has aligned itself with the European Union statement delivered this morning and it therefore goes without saying that it fully subscribes to its content. I would, however, like to elaborate a bit and present additional views of my delegation on one specific aspect of the issue of children in armed conflict.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child protects children — by which it means persons below the age of 18 — in a wide variety of situations. But paradoxically, it also contains a clause according to which the age limit for entitlement to such protection is lowered to 15 years when a child takes part in armed conflict, that is, in a situation which typically endangers the child and leads to a violation of its rights. Regrettably, the fact that the international community has been so far unable to set a higher standard is merely a reflection of the current state of affairs; estimates indicate that 250,000 children below the age of 18 are taking part in more than 30 armed conflicts around the world. According to information provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), children represent 40 per cent of all victims of armed conflicts.

The Commission on Human Rights working group on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts has so far, after four sessions, failed to reach consensus on the text or, more importantly, on crucial issues such as the age limit for participation in armed conflicts.

We are convinced that potential decisions to set this age limit anywhere below 18 years would discredit the just intentions and efforts of the United Nations to protect effectively the rights of the child. We believe that those few Governments which have difficulties with the text of the draft protocol will review their position so that the protocol can be finalized as soon as possible.

The Czech Republic is now experiencing far-reaching legislative changes, and we therefore fully understand how difficult it is to overhaul domestic legislation and introduce new rules and put them into practice. However, we cannot accept the tendency to adjust international standards according to the domestic law of any State. On the contrary, international standards must be taken as a model for the adjustment of both domestic law and practice.

The Czech Republic will actively promote the creation of an international standard which will become the springboard for changing international practice. To this end, we will support the efforts of the newly created coalition of the major international non-governmental organizations against the use of child soldiers. The implementation of the new standard will require a comprehensive long-term effort. However, we wish to reaffirm Economic and Social Council decision 1997/281, and hope that the text of the protocol will be approved next year.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Ukraine. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Yel'chenko (Ukraine): At the outset, let me quote the famous American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay who, more than 60 years ago, said that childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies. It is a good wish, but unfortunately, in reality, every day we witness the deaths of many children around the globe. In the past two decades, 2 million children have been killed in armed conflicts, and about three times that number have been seriously injured. In today's wars, children make up about half of the casualties. They are being deliberately recruited as combatants. Often they are even unaware of the real dangers they face. Millions of children have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries as refugees or

have been internally displaced within their home countries.

Among other problems are gender-based violence, the danger of landmines and many indirect results of warfare, such as malnutrition and other diseases, long-lasting psychological disorders and the loss of families.

In other words, wars violate every right of a child: the right to live, the right to be with family and community, the right to health, the right to development of the personality and the right to be nurtured and protected.

It cannot be denied that the international community has been greatly concerned about this situation and has taken many steps to improve it. International law, including the four Geneva Conventions, the two Additional Protocols, the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognize the right of children to the necessary protection. In addition, various regional and national instruments provide specific protection for children in armed conflicts.

Unfortunately, as has been said, when arms speak, documents remain silent, lacking enforcement. In this regard, we hope that the future international criminal court will be able to play an appropriate role in responding to this challenge.

Ukraine has always paid great attention to the strengthening of the legal regime in the sphere of protecting the rights of human beings, especially those of children. We emphasize the importance of the appeal made by the World Conference on Human Rights, which urged the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implementation by all the States parties through the adoption of all the necessary legislative, administrative and other measures and the allocation, to the maximum extent, of the available resources.

We would like to note the extremely relevant efforts undertaken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu. It is very important to ensure that the necessary support is made available for the effective performance of his mandate.

What is important and, in principle, attainable today is the need to create a universal mechanism that would effectively and unconditionally penalize the perpetrators of crimes against children, especially in armed conflicts. In this respect, a clear signal should be sent from this meeting of the Security Council to the ongoing Diplomatic Conference in Rome in support of the establishment of a strong, effective and universal international criminal court, the jurisdiction of which would include these kinds of crimes as the most serious crimes against mankind.

Secondly, there is a need to promote regional mechanisms and arrangements for the prompt and impartial investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for crimes against children. Thirdly, we need the establishment of a global "search and capture" system that would create conditions in which the perpetrators would not be able to find safe havens for themselves anywhere in the world.

In addition, humanitarian norms should be implemented and measures taken in order to protect children and facilitate assistance to them in war zones. Such measures should include protection for children against the indiscriminate use of all weapons of war, especially anti-personnel mines. The need for aftercare and rehabilitation of children traumatized by war must be addressed urgently.

Finally, I would like to recall the lesson learned by Ms. Graça Machel, the Expert of the Secretary-General on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, who spent two years in different countries that were involved in wars and who prepared a report entitled "Impact of armed conflict on children", document A/51/306. She concluded that despite being targets in contemporary armed conflicts, and despite the brutality shown towards them and the failure of adults to nurture and protect them, children are both our reason to eliminate the worst aspects of armed conflict and our best hope of succeeding in that endeavour. In a world of disparity, children are a unifying force capable of bringing us all together in support of a common ethic.

Protecting children from the impact of armed conflict is the responsibility of everyone: Governments, international organizations and every part of civil society.

Our delegation is very hopeful that today's consideration of this issue in the Security Council will make a substantial contribution to the efforts of the world community in its successful and, more importantly, effective response to this challenge.

The President: The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Latvia. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Priedkalns (Latvia): Allow me to share in the condolences at the untimely passing of our esteemed colleague, Mr. Blondin Beye, in the line of duty.

On behalf of the Government of Latvia, may I congratulate you, Mr. President, on your leadership of this important debate. It has often been said that a sign of a civilized society is the caring way in which it deals with those of its members least able to defend themselves. Children are certainly among those who lack the political and legal means to defend their rights. Thus it is our strong conviction that support for the role of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as an advocate for the protection of children affected by armed conflict be expressed in terms of specific proposals and allocations.

There are various estimates, but they all refer not to thousands but rather to millions of children affected by war in the last decade. They have been killed in armed conflict, seriously injured, orphaned or left homeless. Many others have fallen victim to disease, deprivation or sexual abuse. This is unacceptable; it is also partly avoidable.

The rights of the child are primarily the responsibility of States, but international efforts to protect children must become more obvious and adequate resources provided. In aligning with the proposals made by the European Union, we wish to ensure demobilization of child soldiers and promote their physical and psychological recovery and social integration after the conflict. We wish also to ensure that international human rights standards and mechanisms be applied to children in situations of armed conflict; that the Convention on the Rights of the Child include reference to the prohibition of children in armed conflict; and with regard to international sanctions, that their effect on children be assessed.

The mandate of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to monitor implementation of the Child Convention in all States parties must be supported by Governments, non-governmental organizations and international bodies. Public opinion must be mobilized to achieve that.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict must be supported by Governments, by non-governmental organizations and by international structures, and the work of the Special Representative should be coordinated with other parts of the United Nations system, such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In caring for children, let us also not forget that a dialogue between regional, national and international authorities is essential for success in this area to be attained. Let us also take note, therefore, of such local societal traditions and values and such moral responsibilities, highly esteemed by regional communities, which are also consistent with the ideals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The President: I thank the representative of Latvia for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of Romania. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Gorita (Romania): Allow me at the outset to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your excellent performance in the exercise of this function.

Since my country has subscribed to the statement delivered by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union, I will briefly focus on some points of particular importance to my Government.

My delegation appreciates as highly significant the convening for the first time in this forum of this public debate on the issue of children in armed conflict. This marks the recognition by the international community of the tremendous importance of children and the urgent need to ensure respect for their rights.

This meeting acquires enhanced significance during this current international year of human rights, when we are commemorating two outstanding events: the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the mid-term review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Romania is profoundly concerned with the devastating impact of war or armed conflict on children. We see it as a failure of the Member States to fulfil the commitment they assumed, in the opening words of the United Nations Charter, to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". The basic living conditions of these children are diminished and destroyed; they can be

driven from their homes and separated from their families. Many suffer serious injuries resulting in permanent disability and are prey to random assaults, rape, mutilation or slaughter.

At the same time, we deplore the trend of increasing participation, direct or indirect, of children in armed conflict. We unreservedly endorse the principle that children must have no part in warfare and that all parties to armed conflicts should refrain from recruiting and involving children in hostilities.

Therefore my delegation takes this opportunity to commend the important work carried out by Mr. Olara Otunnu, in his capacity as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in raising the awareness of Governments, civil society and the international community alike on unacceptable violations of the rights of the child. We appreciate his endeavours to collect information and render it visible and, through international cooperation in this field, to promote national and international measures in order to improve the situation of those children and ensure respect for their human rights.

I should like also to pay homage to Ms. Graça Machel, who, by her challenging report on the impact of armed conflict on children, presented in 1996, and by her valuable recommendations, practically unleashed the international campaign on this painful issue.

The situation of children in armed conflict is closely related to the question of the status and well-being of refugee and displaced children as well as to that of juvenile exploitation. Accordingly, it should be given enhanced consideration, in a coordinated manner and from multiple perspectives, by all the United Nations entities which deal with these issues. I have in mind in particular, in addition to the indispensable political approach by the General Assembly and the Security Council, the most valuable expertise of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We welcome in this respect the initiative of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to bring together, in an informal advisory group, senior officers from several United Nations structures.

In our opinion, particular care should be taken by Governments, with the support of the international community, to ensure the physical and psychic recovery of children suffering from war traumas and their reintegration into society.

Romania shares the view that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a comprehensive legal framework for protecting children, for providing for their needs and well-being, and for allowing them to grow and develop with dignity. Thus we urge the United Nations Member States to achieve its universal ratification and to fully implement its provisions. We should not forget that these provisions apply equally in time of peace and in time of armed conflict.

Likewise, considering the need for adjusting the legal framework to the specific situation of children in warfare, Romania strongly supports the finalization and adoption of the draft optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that our action and cooperation should be guided by the commitment to give a high priority to the essential needs of children at both the national and international levels, in time of peace as well as in time of armed conflict. We believe that today's public debate and the presidential statement to be adopted at the end of the debate are an important step forward in this direction.

The President: I thank the representative of Romania for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker inscribed on my list is the representative of El Salvador. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Castaneda Cornejo (El Salvador) (*interpretation from Spanish*): I congratulate you, Mr. President, on the important initiative to convene this meeting of the Security Council to address a universal issue that is of great humanitarian import.

We wish also to express our satisfaction at the appointment of Ambassador Olara Otunnu as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. As he carries out his mandate, he is kindling growing interest by Governments in taking genuine measures to meet this urgent and important challenge.

El Salvador fully shares the international concern at the growing number of children in various parts of the

world who are recruited or who volunteer to participate in hostilities. That concern is all the greater as we daily see the harmful after-effects of war on our own children: more refugees, more displaced persons, sexual abuse and exploitation, drug addiction, alcoholism, increased numbers of children maimed by landmines, children left orphaned, mental illness and psychological trauma. All of this makes for an uncertain future for our societies and for the persistence of the vicious cycle of poverty.

For more than a decade, we in El Salvador have experienced the horrors of war, but the most vulnerable among us — women and children — have suffered the most. We therefore think it essential to join in calling for the settlement of conflicts through dialogue and negotiation, and for a radical change in the objectives of war, including civil war, that would ban forever the direct or indirect employment or involvement of children. The international community has been formulating important initiatives to put an end to this phenomenon, which endangers the lives, health and emotional well-being of children directly involved in hostilities, which destroys the human and financial resources needed to rebuild nations devastated by war and which jeopardizes the viability and governability of countries over the longer term.

Among these initiatives I would highlight the report of the expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, on the impact of armed conflict on children. That report presents important evidence on the various ways in which children are abused and brutalized in war, and offers alternatives and recommendations for action in a number of areas.

Negotiations are now under way at Rome on the establishment of an international criminal court, which provides a good opportunity to engage in a full debate and to adopt key decisions on children in armed conflict. The international community might consider laying down clear, firm rules prohibiting the continued active participation of children in armed conflict — which already constitutes a flagrant violation of existing international norms contained in the instruments of international humanitarian law and in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We therefore believe that recruiting children into armed forces and participation by children in hostilities should be included on the list of war crimes in the draft statute of the international criminal court.

Let me conclude by citing a remark made some years ago by a former Secretary-General, Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, a remark that remains valid today:

> "The way in which a society treats its children reflects not only how compassionate and caring it is, but also its sense of justice, its commitment to the future and its desire to improve the human condition.... This is an indisputable truth, both for the community of nations and for each individual nation."

The President: I thank the representative of El Salvador for the kind words he addressed to me.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Azerbaijan and Liberia, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan) and Ms. Osode (Liberia) took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: The next speaker is the representative of Liberia. I invite her to take a seat at the Council table and to make her statement.

Ms. Osode (Liberia): My delegation associates itself with the condolences expressed by the Organization of African Unity on the tragic and untimely deaths that occurred over the weekend.

In the midst of the interest and grave concern that is being expressed about children affected by armed conflict and that has occasioned this open meeting of the Security Council, my delegation is pleased, Mr. President, that these deliberations are being carried out under your enlightened leadership. We trust that this timely meeting will challenge participants, and the entire international community, and will heighten their awareness of the plight of children in armed conflicts. It is our hope that the results of these deliberations will encourage, in particular, the demand for the implementation and monitoring of the demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers and for measures for mine-clearance.

In this context, my delegation recognizes Mr. Olara Otunnu, whose outstanding qualifications and experience fit him well to serve as the first Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. My delegation wishes him the best of success in carrying out his mandate. We welcome the measures that he has proposed today, and will recommend them to our Government for its support.

None of us here is likely to forget any of the more significant global conflicts and the atrocities committed against innocent civilians, in particular women, children and the elderly. While it is true that there is a crisis in values in each of our respective countries, we cannot ignore the fact of outside influences. Some of those who find the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts most revolting are themselves instigators and perpetrators of conflicts around the world. With the global increase in conflicts, particularly in Africa, the use of child soldiers has increased as well.

Mr. Otunnu has provided startling specific statistics on the children in armed conflicts, supported by the newsletter *Children of War*, October 1997, which reveals the new figure of at least 35,000 child soldiers, some as young as seven years of age, which my delegation finds very distressing. These are children like ours, who also want to be free from traumatic experiences of conflict situations, to secure some degree of certainty about their future or to engage in vocational training. Instead, they continue to be marginalized, vulnerable, orphaned or displaced, and have been forcibly conscripted to participate in combat and given mood-altering drugs in many instances.

My delegation recalls how the use of child soldiers in the Liberian civil conflict, prior to the democratically elected Government of President Charles Taylor, was frequently attacked in this Chamber as an odious, inhumane and criminal practice. United Nations estimates showed that some 15,000 to 20,000 children had directly participated in violent acts, were forced to kill or maim, were exposed to fighting and were themselves brutally victimized. Some fought with factions as a means of survival.

Certainly the extent of this problem is without doubt considerable in other countries. For example, according to the aforementioned newsletter, one of Liberia's neighbours has one of the worst records of recruiting child soldiers. It states that between 1992 and 1996 an estimated 4,500 children were forced to fight on both sides, with the former Government forces junta and with the rebels, which later became an alliance of strange bedfellows to commit atrocities against the Government and the people of this sisterly country.

One of the many challenging problems facing both of our Governments has been the demobilization of combatants. Regrettably, mobilization programmes for former fighters are most inadequate and have failed to sufficiently address the use of child soldiers, which has caused a number of them to go back into fighting. My delegation recalls that at the special ministerial meeting on Liberia in October 1997 particular attention was drawn to the importance of ensuring that adequate programmes and activities were provided for demobilized fighters — fighters who at 12 years of age in 1990 are 21 today, and some are more hardened in their criminal activities.

Liberia is gaining ground and is looking beyond its dark days and previous differences, and we, the people, are working in an all-inclusive Government to secure the peace and rebuild our war-torn country. But demobilization, as recognized by the ministerial conference, remains one of the key challenges for both Liberia and the international community and one that is central to the prospects for successful peace-building in my country.

Liberia wishes to express its gratitude to the international community and donors for their continued support for Liberia's reconstruction, rehabilitation and resettlement programmes, and, indeed, humanitarian assistance. It wishes to appeal to donors concerned to be mindful of their pledges to assist in the demobilization of former combatants, including child soldiers.

My delegation also takes this opportunity to greatly commend the Secretary-General's envoy, Mr. Luciano Pavarotti, who is not present here, for his benevolence in giving a charity concert in his hometown of Modena, the proceeds of which are pledged to the construction of a village for children who are victims of war. His human touch will go a long way in Liberia's peace-building.

Finally, the international community must work in concert with both the public and private sectors to save the child soldiers from being a lost generation and to improve their lot in life. By our commitment and political will, our interests and concerns will not be seen as expressions of mere emotion and sentimentality.

The President: I thank the representative of Liberia for her kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Azerbaijan. I invite him to take a seat at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. Kouliev (Azerbaijan)(*interpretation from Russian*): Allow me to express my gratitude to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting of the Security Council, which is devoted to such an important and urgent problem.

Armed conflicts occurring today in various countries and regions of the world continue to bring untold suffering to millions of people. They bring destruction, conflagration, hunger and disease. They turn millions of people into refugees and displaced persons, and the first to suffer are children. Defenceless as they are, they become the targets of the cruellest abuses: hostage-taking, rape, humiliation and forced labour. This is a danger for civilization because today's children are the generation of tomorrow. How will they grow up? What are we inculcating in them? In the General Assembly and in other forums, our delegation has repeatedly underscored the importance of further study of the effects of armed conflicts upon children.

We fully support the study conducted under the leadership of Ms. Graça Machel. We value highly the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Mr. Olara Otunnu. We believe that his work deserves the fullest support.

Unfortunately, our country had to experience first hand all the dire ills and disruptions of armed conflict. Mr. Otunnu said that most armed conflicts throughout the world today take the form of civil wars. However, there also continue to be acts of direct armed aggression. As a result of the armed aggression by Armenia and the continuing occupation of 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan, there are today a million refugees and displaced persons in our country. Over 400,000 of them are children, who experience the harshest consequences of expulsion, loss of family, hunger and severe winters. They continue to live in tented encampments and railway cars, awaiting only the resolution of their fate and, above all, wondering when they will be able to return safely home.

We support Mr. Otunnu's view that it is essential to ensure the return of refugees and displaced persons to their permanent homes. Placing children under alien conditions and removing them from their families will affect their consciousness throughout their lives. A peaceful settlement of armed conflicts and returning home will foster the psychological and social rehabilitation of children and ensure that they gradually forget feelings of hostility. This is why our country has always sought a peaceful settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the return of all refugees and displaced persons to their permanent homes.

We consider that under conditions of an unresolved conflict, humanitarian assistance for refugees and displaced persons is an essential element for the survival of the affected population. We are not talking here solely of a certain amount of assistance, products or pharmaceuticals without which human life is impossible. By obtaining assistance, refugees and displaced persons see the involvement of the international community in their plight and thus continue to have hope for a just settlement of the armed conflict.

In this connection, allow me to express our gratitude to the donors and the organizations within the United Nations system — particularly the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme, as well as other international organizations and States that provide humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan.

An inter-Republic meeting devoted to the problems of refugees and displaced persons was held few days ago in Baku under the chairmanship of the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Heydar Aliyev. The meeting considered questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and comprehensively addressed the matter of national structures to mitigate the plight of this sector of the population. It also underscored that the lack of a solution to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and the continuing occupation of 20 per cent of Azerbaijan's territory by Armenian armed forces are the basic reasons for these people's suffering. The same meeting also considered ways and means of effectively using all available resources, as well as the humanitarian assistance rendered by international organizations, to support refugees and displaced persons.

We understand how difficult it is for conflicting parties to reconcile and try to meet each other halfway. At the same time, we consider that those States that continue to violate international humanitarian and human rights laws must suffer sanctions at the hands of the

international community. The international community should strongly say "no" to those countries that are holding up the process of reconciliation because of their political ambitions.

The Security Council could play a major role in this, *inter alia*, by determining measures that could make up a mechanism for resolving existing conflicts and averting potential ones. Any party to an armed conflict must assume responsibility for the consequences of the conflict.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Portugal.

Portugal fully subscribes to the statement made earlier by the Presidency of the European Union.

The Graça Machel report on the impact of armed conflicts on children, submitted to the General Assembly in 1996, revealed to the international community the extent of the suffering of child victims of armed conflicts throughout the world. The painful awareness of this scourge led the Members of the United Nations to request the Secretary-General to name a Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ambassador Olara Otunnu. I thank him and welcome his presence among us here today.

The need for collective action to overcome this scourge led Portugal to propose that members of the Security Council hear the Special Representative, which occurred in informal consultations last 11 June; and it was the impact of what he reported to the members of the Council that gave birth to the idea to hold this debate here today, open to all Members of the United Nations. My delegation listened carefully to Ambassador Otunnu's forceful statement today and will spare no effort to translate his specific proposals into action.

The Security Council is called upon on a daily basis to deliberate on situations and conflicts that illustrate the perverse development in the conduct of war in recent years, namely, that civilian populations — above all women and children — are increasingly affected by armed conflicts and transformed into the targets and tools of war. It is disheartening to compare, as Ambassador Otunnu did, the numbers of victims of current conflicts with those of the world wars of this century.

On the one hand, technological advances explain that abhorrent development by permitting, for example, the production of small arms, which are easily manipulated by child soldiers, and stimulates the recruitment of children into armies and armed groups. Those same technological advances permit the manufacture of mines and chemical and biological weapons, which blindly victimize the non-combatant population.

On the other hand, despite the existence of normative international instruments — the Geneva Conventions, their respective Additional Protocols and the Convention on the Rights of the Child drawn up by the United Nations — and the extremely important role played by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the minimum standards of respect for human rights in situations of war are systematically ignored and violated both by governmental forces and by non-State actors. Ambassador Otunnu has also called our attention to the failure of the local systems of traditional values that have always prevailed in any society, culture or region in defence of the innocent and the most vulnerable, especially children.

We have, however, made some significant progress. The convergence of the efforts of all allowed us to take a major step in this struggle by adopting the Convention on the indiscriminate use of landmines, to which my country has the honour to have subscribed. Alongside other countries, and in a similar partnership with various non-governmental organizations, Portugal is now committed to bringing about the adoption of a convention to control the use of small arms.

It is, however, paradoxical that practically every Member State of the United Nations has subscribed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most inclusive of all instruments of international law, ratified by 191 countries; and yet, every day, we see a rapid increase in the number of children killed, injured, violated, exploited, uprooted and without support, in great part due to the effects of armed violence. At the threshold of the new millennium, despite the achievements of our species in many fields, that which distinguishes us from other creatures is at risk: the very essence of humanity, respect for the dignity of the human being — and in this case, the most vulnerable of all human beings.

We in the United Nations have to act to stop or to minimize the suffering of children in armed conflict. We cannot continue to overestimate certain principles of relations between States and Governments at the expense of the rights of citizens whom those very States and Governments are supposed to protect — and, indeed, exist to protect. Peace and security, stability and

prosperity, even national sovereignty: these goals are attainable only if human security is also assured, including that of children — especially that of children.

The effect of armed conflict on children is one of those problems that, because of its seriousness, scope and nature, is relevant to the entire United Nations system and, directly or indirectly, falls into the area of competence of various departments, organs, programmes, funds and agencies. Taking the lead is the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which has carried out notable efforts to alert us to the dimensions of the problem and to promote actions designed to counter it. But we also have the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other Secretariat departments, such as the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations; as well as programmes, funds and agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Food Programme (WFP); and, finally, the international financial institutions, namely, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Security Council, in the exercise of its functions and responsibilities, and when deliberating what action it will take in any conflict, cannot fail to participate in this collective effort by the United Nations system. It must participate through reaction against the abuse and violations of the rights of children committed by the parties. Through the adoption of measures appropriate to each case, the parties should be led to respect effectively their obligations under international law, particularly under the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Council should condemn the involvement of children in armed conflict, particularly their mobilization by regular forces or armed groups. It should watch over the protection of and respect for the rights of children, specifically through the mandates it gives to peacekeeping and peace-building operations. Within United Nations missions, priority should be given to programmes for national reconstruction and the social rehabilitation of children and youth. The Council should seek to assess in advance the impact of any sanctions regime on the situation of children and vulnerable groups, such as pregnant and nursing mothers, thus ensuring the necessary humanitarian exemptions to minimize their negative effects. Above all, however, the Council should combat, through its action, the sense of impunity in those belligerents responsible for the atrocities and abuses committed against children, whether they happen to be acting on behalf of Governments or not. The Council can concede neither credibility nor legitimacy to such criminals, regardless of the part they might play in the resolution of the conflict.

Here I am referring to concrete situations under consideration by the Council: the monstrous child mutilations committed by the leaders of the FARC/RUF in Sierra Leone; the cruel abduction of Ugandan children to reinforce the ranks of the Lord's Resistance Army; or the decisions taken in Afghanistan to prevent girls from attending school or having access to hospitals.

The Security Council clearly has a political and ethical role to play in putting a stop to this impunity — a role complementary to the action of tribunals which must be assured at the national and international levels. In this context, I recall a joint statement issued on 17 June 1998 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Otunnu, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the High Commissioners for Refugees and for Human Rights and the Emergency Relief Coordinator:

> "The perpetrators of these atrocities are deaf to appeals from the international community ... We believe that much of the criminal violence in armed conflicts and rebellions is the result of impunity."

To that end, the creation of an international criminal court, which Portugal wishes to see come to fruition in Rome, will be of decisive importance — an independent and well-equipped court to try and punish war criminals and those responsible for crimes against humanity, a court that will have the protection of the rights of children as an integral part of its statute and mandate, one that will take into account as a mitigating factor the young age of the accused while considering it an aggravating factor in the behaviour of adults when children have been involved in committing the crime.

The exposure of children to the consequences of armed conflicts is made banal by the recruitment of individuals under 18 years of age into their regular armies. These are young men and women who are not allowed to vote but are considered fit to enter combat. This is what Ambassador Otunnu told the Council on 11 June, defending his belief that it is necessary to establish internationally a minimum age of 18 years for military recruitment, through the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Portugal hopes

that the working group of the Commission on Human Rights established for that purpose will soon complete its work successfully.

It is a fortunate coincidence that this debate among Members of the United Nations promoted by the Security Council precedes by one day the launching by a coalition of non-governmental organizations of a global campaign entitled "Stop Using Child Soldiers". This coalition includes Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Jesuit Refugees Service, the Quaker United Nations Office, the Radda Barnen Save the Children and the Terre des Hommes. The general mobilization required to combat the use of children in armed conflict will obviously need to awaken public opinion — from those sitting in front of their television sets to those who are grass-roots combatants. The partnership of the United Nations and its Member States with civil society — namely, the non-governmental organizations and the media — is vital to eradicate this scourge.

As the Nobel Prize-winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu said,

> "It is immoral that adults should want children to fight their wars for them ... There is simply no excuse, no acceptable argument for arming children."

I conclude by reaffirming the strong support of Portugal for the mandate of and the action being developed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. I hope that this open debate and the presidential statement to be delivered later on will represent useful tools to assist his endeavours to protect children in situations of armed conflict all over the world.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Council will continue its consideration of this item at its next meeting, to be convened immediately after the adjournment of this meeting.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.